



Transgender Day Of Remembrance

November 20, 2006

Vigils, services and a variety of other events are being held in 250 cities around the world today to mark Transgender Day of Remembrance - the day set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice.

The first Transgender Day of Remembrance was organized by Gwendolyn Ann Smith in 1999 to honor the memory of Rita Hester who was murdered on November 28th, 1998 in San Francisco.

Smith's candlelight vigil spread nationwide and then around the world. But Hester's murder — like most anti-transgender murder cases — has yet to be solved.

"The Transgender Day of Remembrance is a solemn time to reflect on those who have been murdered because of their gender identity or expression," said Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality.

While there are no official statistics - the FBI does not keep records of trans killings - transgender advocacy groups say they number in the hundreds over the past decade. Some studies have shown that crimes against the trans community accounts for 10 percent of all violent crimes in America.

"The National Center for Transgender Equality and our allies have made great strides advocating for federal hate crimes legislation to explicitly include crimes based on 'gender identity and expression' — the language that covers transgender individuals — but we will need to continue educating policy-makers about the rampant violence targeted at our communities," said Keisling.

Last year the House of Representatives passed for the first time ever a bill that would give local law enforcement vital tools to fight bias crimes against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans.

The Senate version of the bill excluded the transgendered from protection and the legislation died in conference when the current session of Congress ended.

"We pledge to our transgender brothers and sisters that we will not allow a federal nondiscrimination or hate crimes bill to move forward that does not include you. You are us and we will not walk down the path to equality without you at our side," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

There are 10 states that have hate crimes laws that explicitly cover transgender people: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, New Mexico, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington.

In California a law was enacted this year that amends jury instructions to state that the use of societal bias, including so-called "panic strategies," to influence the proceedings of a criminal trial is not permitted.

This law is named in the memory of Gwen Araujo, a transgender teenager from Newark, Calif., who was attacked and killed in 2002.

Based on data from the 2000 Census, the total number of people now living in a jurisdiction with a transgender-inclusive anti-discrimination law in the United States is 86 million people, 31 percent of the nation's population.