



June 20, 2016

**The U.S. Commission On Civil Rights Statement Regarding The Observation Of
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, And Transgender Pride Month 2016**

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, by majority vote, observes the importance of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month. President Obama recently stated that LGBT “advocates and allies ... have spurred sweeping progress by changing hearts and minds and by demanding equal treatment -- under our laws, from our courts, and in our politics. ... [W]e recommit to bending the arc of our Nation toward justice.”¹

Progress aside for the moment, however, the most immediate issue at hand is the nation’s largest mass shooting, which occurred on June 12, 2016. This targeted killing of 49 LGBT people and their allies, and the shooting of over 50 more, took place at the club and community center Pulse in Orlando, Florida. Pulse is more than a nightclub. The co-owner founded Pulse in memory of her brother who died of AIDS. Pulse has fostered safety, organizing and empowerment for the local LGBT community. It has special significance for the area’s Latino LGBT community, and the killer, armed with an assault rifle, staged his carnage and hostage-taking on a Latin celebration night. The Orlando massacre demonstrated all too painfully that anti-LGBT hatred remains virulent – and far too easily well-armed – in this country today. The Commission grieves the fallen and stands in unity with their families, with the injured, and with the loved ones of all. The Commission also recognizes the courage of the law enforcement officers, other first responders, hospital personnel, and Orlando-area blood donors who saved lives at Pulse and in the days following the attack.

¹ The President’s proclamation may be found at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/31/presidential-proclamation-lgbt-pride-month-2016>.

In reflecting upon steps toward LGBT equality under the law prior to this week's slayings, we must remember that in very recent times, the U.S. government refused to hire LGBT workers, patriotic LGBT Americans were precluded from military service, consenting adult relationships were criminalized, LGBT parents were deprived of custody of their own children, and police raids and brutality at LGBT gathering places, including the Stonewall Inn, were common. We pay tribute to the courageous early organizers who were not deterred by prejudice, including Harry Hay – a founder of the Mattachine Society in 1950 - and Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, whose Daughters of Bilitis became the first American lesbian political organization in 1955. We acclaim the early advocacy by politicians including U.S. Representatives Bella Abzug, Ed Koch, Shirley Chisholm, and Barbara Jordan. We recall the bravery of the fallen, including visionary San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, who stated prophetically before his 1978 assassination, "If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door." We pay our respects to victims of hate crimes, including Matthew Shepard. We offer special tribute to the many transgender people murdered each year, including Monica Loera, Kayden Clarke, Maya Young, and others who died violently in the shadows. We grieve our many LGBT youth lost to suicide, including Justin Aaberg and Carl Walker-Hoover. Of course, we also mourn the women and men lost to HIV/AIDS, were they LGBT or not – especially those who suffered and died in the early years of the crisis, when the federal government stood silent in the face of the threat. And we thank Edie Windsor, James Obergefell, and others who recently stood up to the federal government because they refused to believe that their relationships were worth less.

Against this backdrop, we are grateful to have many recent steps toward LGBT equality to celebrate. The federal government now freely employs LGBT people. Employment and other civil rights protections are in place in many states. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are free to serve openly in the U.S. military. The recognition of the constitutional right of same-sex couples to marry legally has opened access to an array of federal and state rights across the land. Countless doctors, social scientists, community activists, and lawyers – both LGBT and allies alike – have made this journey possible.

Vigilance, however, must remain our guiding principle. In too many places across the nation, LGBT people still live on relatively small islands of freedom and safety in the hostile sea of society. Hate crimes are perpetrated yet. Many states lack basic civil rights protections for LGBT people. LGBT people can be fired or evicted in much of the country simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many schools remain unsafe for LGBT students. Rates of suicide and attempts at self-harm remain disproportionately high among LGBT youth. Much work remains to be done to bring the promise of full equality under the law to LGBT people. We are encouraged by the introduction of the federal Equality Act, which seeks to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Fair Housing Act, and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act to protect LGBT people.

Alarming, transgender people have become the newest scapegoat of certain American political interests. Myriad laws and proposals across the country, the so-called "bathroom bills," seek to shame, stigmatize, and endanger transgender people in the use

of public restrooms. The Commission condemned these efforts in its statement of April 18, 2016.² LGBT people and their allies must continue their critical, life-saving work together.

“I am honored that our U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, over the past five and one half years, has done more than past Commissions to examine and recommend how we can better protect the rights of members of the LGBT community. We join in celebrating the community’s successes and commit to remain allied to help address the challenges that yet remain,” said Commission Chairman Martin R. Castro.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing a federal civil rights enforcement report. For information about Commission’s reports and meetings, visit <http://www.usccr.gov>.

² The Commission’s statement may be found at http://www.usccr.gov/press/2016/PR_Statement_LGBTDiscrimination.pdf.