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**TransFaith Online
National Center for Transgender Equality
The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion & Ministry**

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Press Conference: Transgender faith leaders lobby for hate crime legislation

WASHINGTON, DC – Dozens of transgender religious leaders converged on legislators today in Washington D.C. to deliver a joint letter in support of hate crimes legislation and against the history of violence against transgender people. The House of Representatives is expected to vote soon on HR 1913, the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act which has the goal of helping local officials handle the demands of hate crimes investigations.

The full letter was released to the media at a press conference on Tuesday, April 28, at the Foundry United Methodist Church in northwest Washington D.C. where transgender faith leaders spoke out for both protection of transgender people, who are often targeted for hate crimes, as well as for reform of the criminal justice system that favors incarceration over education.

The Rev. Malcolm Himschoot said, “Lawmakers and judicial authorities need to bring moral imagination to the problem of hate crimes. If people are taught to hate and dehumanize transgender people, they can also be taught to be respectful.”

The full letter from transgender religious leaders reflected on the recent murder of Angie Zapata in Colorado:

The ‘guilty’ verdict reached in a court of law dignified, but could never repair, the value of Angie’s life and the gravity of her loss. Yet, our experience in ministries that work toward nonviolent alternatives reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders does not allow us to believe we can achieve safety by disposing of people behind bars.

Nicole Garcia, transgender representative for Lutherans Concerned, North America said, “The recent murder of Angie Zapata galvanized transgender religious leaders. As people of faith we hold to a story of justice, not violence; a story of restoration, not retribution. Hundreds of transgender persons have been murdered and that must stop. All of us must open our eyes to our beautifully diverse world. It is time for transgender people of faith to be seen and heard. It is time for a season of respect.”

Himschoot, a United Church of Christ minister, initiated the statement in support of hate crimes legislation and full human rights of transgender people. The statement was signed by close to

fifty faith leaders—many of whom attended the lobbying day and delivered the statement to members of the Senators and members of the House of Representatives.

Transgender faith leaders spoke to decision makers about the poverty that comes with prejudice and employment discrimination. Encouraging the resources and reliability of federal protection everywhere, they spoke highly of officials in Colorado who resisted the so-called “trans panic defense” as an excuse for murdering transgender people.

We are grateful for responsible investigators, prosecutors, and a jury who invalidated a harmful and re-victimizing “trans-panic” defense. No one is responsible for their own beating, bashing or killing.

Garcia said, “I don’t live in fear anymore. I live with hope. I live to educate and help people realize that we are all human beings with feelings, family and faith. We all matter. I pray that Angie’s family finds some peace and consolation in the guilty verdict. I pray for Allen Andrade. His life will now be a series of prison cells for years to come. I hope he finds peace as well.”

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The Transgender Religious Leaders Network is an emerging collaboration of transgender-identified religious and spiritual leaders, connecting to support one another and collaborate on diverse projects.

The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) is a 501(c)3 social justice organization dedicated to advancing the equality of transgender people through advocacy, collaboration and empowerment.

The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) was established at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California and opened its doors in the fall of 2000. Its mission is to advance the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and to transform faith communities and the wider society by taking a leading role in shaping a new public discourse on religion and sexuality through education, research, community building and advocacy.

TransFaith Online is dedicated to supporting transgender folks in our faith journeys, while providing useful resources to help people of faith become better educated trans-ally.

Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA) is an outreach organization that embodies, inspires, advocates and organizes for the acceptance and full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities within the Lutheran communion and its ecumenical and global partners.