

N°1 · DECEMBER 2018

# LIBERATE



IN LIEU OF AN ANNUAL REPORT,  
AN ANNUAL PUBLICATION BY LOUISIANA TRANS ADVOCATES

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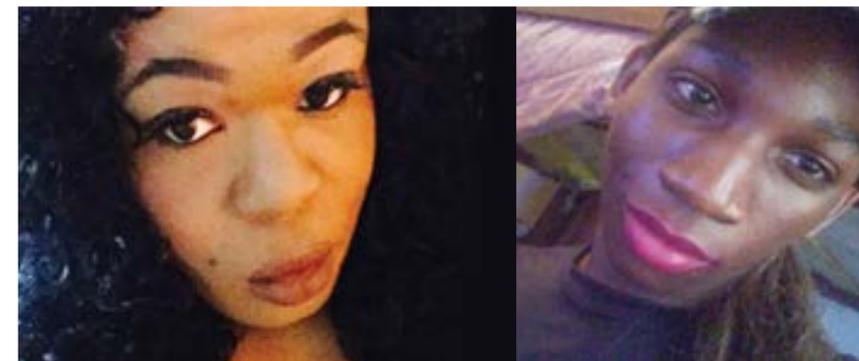
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# A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Amia Tyrae Berryman, age 28, Baton Rouge

Vontashia Bell, age 18, Shreveport

As 2018 comes to a close, I've been spending time reflecting on the losses and the challenges we've faced this year. In March, the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled in favor of Attorney General Jeff Landry in his case challenging Governor John Bel Edwards' executive order prohibiting discrimination against queer and trans people employed by or seeking services from the state. It was a tough blow to my own personal morale, not to mention to that of people throughout Louisiana who had been granted these protections for the first time, only to see them taken away. I'd helped negotiate the order in 2016 after Governor Edwards took office. It was a difficult day.

Not three days later, we received far worse news. A member of our community, Amia Tyrae Berryman, 28, had been shot and killed in our capital city. Amia was a black transgender woman, the first killed in Louisiana this year, and the 7th in the country. We knew that she wouldn't be the last. Louisiana has been an outlier when it comes to violence against transgender people. Our state has been home to one-tenth of all trans people murdered in the United States since 2013, despite only making up 1.5 percent of the country's population. This statistic is shocking until you consider all the factors that converge here in our small corner of the country. We fight for first place each year in state rankings of rates of poverty, child poverty, hunger, housing insecurity, and poor health outcomes. We have the largest gender wage gap in the nation, the lowest rate of youth connected to employment or education, the sixth highest rate of children in out-of-home care, and until recently, the highest incarceration rate (due to recent reforms, Oklahoma has overtaken us on this one). Mix that together with prevailing red state attitudes and the current, violent anti-trans rhetoric infecting our national discourse, and suddenly it's easy to see how Louisiana has borne an epidemic of violence against trans people.

Later this year, we received word that in the early hours of August 30, another black transgender woman, Vontashia Bell, 18, was fatally shot in Shreveport, Louisiana. I am diminished by the loss of Amia and Vontashia. I mourn for them, for their loved ones, and

for the missed opportunity to get the chance to know the women they would have become in the years of their lives that were stolen from them. While I mourn, I honor the bravery and resilience of the thousands of transgender people who call Louisiana home, and I reaffirm my commitment to the fight for the liberation of trans and nonbinary people throughout our state.

It was with Amia and Vontashia in mind that we organized our response to yet another attack on the humanity and dignity of trans people in October. When The New York Times reported on a Sunday morning that Trump's Department of Health and Human Services was circulating a memo among federal agencies with the goal of reaching a consensus around a definition of gender that erased federal recognition of transgender and intersex Americans, we sprung into action. Over the course of just two weeks, we collected the signatures of more than 1,000 Louisianans on a petition opposing the HHS proposal. We drafted a letter of opposition from health care providers to federal and state officials and recruited organizational signatures representing more than 3,000 health care providers (including Tulane University School of Medicine), plus the signatures of an additional 250 individual health care providers. We launched our Faith and Family Council, a leadership council of clergy and faith leaders who provide prophetic leadership from religious communities to support Louisiana families at an elevated risk for experiencing discrimination.

So here's where things stand. Our adversaries have never been more committed to nor more empowered in their work to erode our rights. But we've also never been as strong as we are right now. And we have more support from our allies, elected officials, faith communities, and others than we've ever had before. So don't despair.

2018 was harder than I'd imagined. We stand ready, because 2019 may be even harder. But we do what we know, and all I know how to do is keep fighting. For Amia and Vontashia. For us. For the opportunities we deserve. For the safety we need. For our voices to be heard. For liberation.

**Dylan Waguespack**  
Board President



WE'RE STRONGER AND MORE FURIOUS THAN EVER BEFORE.

*Louisiana Trans Advocates has experienced a rebirth in 2018, and that means stronger advocacy, better access to social support, and more programs for our members throughout the state. Here's a glimpse at what we've been up to and what to expect in 2019.*

2018 has been a banner year for Louisiana Trans Advocates. Our organization struggled to regain footing after the loss of Donna Jean Loy in early 2017 and a series of leadership changes. We had many dedicated volunteer leaders whose careers and family lives brought them to other parts of the country, and throughout much of 2017, we had few volunteers who were able to lend their time and talents to our work. In early 2018, we kicked back into gear, and by May 2018, we found ourselves with more capacity to do the work of LTA than we've experienced in our organization's history.

This year has been a year of incredible growth. We launched our Monroe and LSU Campus chapters, formalized the chapter membership of the Southern Transmasculine Alliance, and started two new groups in New Orleans, a children's play group and a support group for nonbinary people.

We also held our first ever annual statewide membership convention this past summer, at which our membership voted to elect Dylan Waguespack to serve as President of the Board and Alexander Andersen to serve as Vice-President of the Board. Each LTA local chapter also had the opportunity to elect a member to serve on the statewide Board of Directors. Our new Board of Directors will serve until May 2020.

Our organization conducted its first census this year. Some of the findings are included in this publication on page 5, but expect a longer report in the early months of 2019. We're excited to let you know that

we'll be conducting the census each year moving forward as a built-in way for our members to share what they're experiencing, both in the Louisiana Trans Advocates community and out in the rest of their lives. The drafting of the 2019 census is underway, and we'll be reaching out to our members in early 2019 for their feedback.

In November 2018, we launched the Louisiana Trans Advocates Faith & Family Council, a group of faith leaders from many religious traditions working to support all Louisiana families and protect them from discrimination. The Council consults with LTA leadership many faith issues including, religious resources supportive of LGBTQ Louisianians, work being done by faith communities to include and protect the most vulnerable, matters related to religious liberty, among others.

We're also excited to announce that we're preparing to launch two leadership development programs -- the LGBTQ Policy Advisors Program and the Trans Leadership Academy. The LGBTQ Policy Advisors Program will be a leadership development opportunity for trans youth ages 18-24 to participate in a six-month training program that will prepare them to work as progressive leaders. While undergoing training, the participants will also serve as LGBTQ policy advisors to elected officials. Keep your eyes open for the application for that program! The Trans Leadership Academy will be a program with a similar training curriculum, but it will be hosted online and available to all of our membership.

## The Donna Jean Loy Memorial Name Change Assistance Fund

In 2018, we granted assistance to 8 trans people seeking assistance for their name changes. Our grantees used the funding to get their court ordered name changes and to replace birth certificates, drivers licenses, and passports. We're raising money for the 2019 round of grants now, and are looking forward to awarding our next round of grants. Watch for the applications to open in April/May, and be sure to apply if you're income limited and need assistance updating your documentation.

## Leadership Development

This past year, we've doubled down on securing leadership development opportunities for our youth volunteers. Youth leaders went to national meetings in Florida, Louisiana, and Tennessee for training and professional development from trans movement leaders across the country. We've also spent much of the year designing two new programs for leadership development that you should expect to hear more about early in 2019 -- our Youth Policy Advisors program and our online LTA Leadership Academy.

## Legislative Advocacy

In the 2018 legislative session, Louisiana Trans Advocates worked on two pieces of LGBTQ-specific legislation: the Student Nondiscrimination Act (SNDA), Senate Bill 228 by Senator Jean-Paul Morrell, and the Employment Nondiscrimination Action (ENDA), Senate Bill 219 by Senator Troy Carter. We provided critical testimony in the Senate Education and Senate Labor Committees on discrimination experienced by trans students and workers in our state. SNDA did not move out of committee, however, ENDA moved to the Senate floor. While ENDA was poised to earn record bipartisan support, the Senate did not cast a formal vote this year. We're working toward a victorious Senate vote in 2019.



## Fundraising & Development Training

Our Vice-President and Development Coordinator Alexander Andersen (age 21) earned a fundraising fellowship with a national development firm, JMM Strategy Group, who partnered with Louisiana Trans Advocates to train Andersen in grant writing, major donor development, and grassroots fundraising. Andersen successfully grew our operational budget by 20 percent while building a development plan for our organization to utilize in the coming year. Andersen's fellowship will continue into March of 2019.

## CENSUS 2018

Louisiana Trans Advocates has held support groups since 2011, and in those 7 years, we have gained a membership of nearly 2,000 trans and gender non-conforming people from all over the state.

We wanted to understand more about the experiences of our members and get feedback on the support and advocacy that we provide. We received census responses from an estimated 13 percent of our members (260 respondents total), and from their responses, we learned a lot about our community.

### The Breakdown

Our membership is nearly 38 percent trans women, 36 percent trans men, and 11 percent nonbinary people. When we asked members their sexual orientation, we found that 25 percent are pansexual, 20 percent are bisexual, 20 percent are heterosexual, 10 percent are lesbian, 10 percent are queer, 6 percent are asexual, and 4 percent are gay.

Of our membership, 57 percent of our group is under 30 years of age. We have members in the Greater New Orleans area, the Greater Baton Rouge area, Acadiana, Northwest Louisiana, Central Louisiana, and the Florida Parishes. The regions with the fewest members are the Thibodaux/Houma area and Northeast Louisiana.

### Housing, Employment, and Health Care

82 percent of our membership reports that they have not experienced homelessness, while 8 percent have experienced homelessness sometime in the last 2 years.

Only 22 percent of our group has not experienced unemployment, while 24 percent are currently unemployed or have been unemployed in the 6 months before taking the census.

12 percent reported not being insured and 23 percent of respondents disclosed that they participate in either traditional Medicaid or Medicaid expansion. 33 percent of our membership is on an employer-provided healthcare plan.

### Room to Grow

Louisiana Trans Advocates's membership is about 75 percent White, 6 percent Latinx or Hispanic, 5 percent mixed-race, 4 percent Black and 2 percent Native American.

72 percent of those that responded know where the meetings are held and 54 percent attend every few months, at least.

N.B. Percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest integer for ease of reading. A full census report will be released in the coming months.

# THREAT ALERT: WHITE NATIONALISM IN LOUISIANA

An interview with David M. Schneider, an expert advisor to the LTA Board of Directors on hate groups and white nationalism.

When President Obama took office in 2009, professionals who track hate groups and militias saw a marked increase in organizing among white nationalists. Southern Poverty Law Center data shows that the number of U.S. hate organizations has nearly doubled in the past two decades — rising from 457 groups active in 1999 to 917 in 2016. While the establishment of new hate groups has statistically nearly stalled since 2016, the groups themselves have been more present and organized under Trump's administration than we've seen in decades. Given the rising threat of white nationalism and hate violence against trans people, TPOC Empowerment Committee co-chair and LTA Board Member Elliot Wade sat down with David M. Schneider, an expert advisor to our Board of Directors on hate groups and white nationalism, to ask him some questions.

**Elliot: How did you get into advocacy work? What drew you to it?**

**David:** In high school, I was the vice president, and briefly the president, of the gay straight alliance. When I went to college, I attended LSU, and I was in Baton Rouge during the crisis surrounding Alton Sterling's murder. After that, I found myself increasingly drawn to issues of civil rights, and then of course Donald Trump was elected. The era that the election of Donald Trump ushered in is dangerous and being surrounded by LGBT+ friends, I quickly became interested in the struggle to resist. For a year and a half, I interned with the Anti-defamation League, and I have been very interested in tracking hate groups and far right political movements ever since. In a sense, I entered this field in order to keep my friends and family safe.

**Elliot: What's the most surprising**

**thing you've learned from your time in advocacy work?**

**David:** Just how deep some of this goes. For instance, we can draw a direct line between the Nazi and neo-Nazi movements of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s to the rise of the alt right today. David Duke is a clear example of this. David Duke in the 80s and 90s pioneered the alt right tactics of dressing far right ideologies up pretty so that people will buy it, and of connecting with far right political movements around the world to increase their own strengths collectively.

**Elliot: What hate groups are currently on the rise in Louisiana? Are there any that are especially dangerous for the trans community? What makes these groups especially dangerous?**

**David:** The hate groups on the rise in Louisiana are as follows: Identity

Europa, the 3%ers, Neo-Confederates, and the Ku Klux Klan. In general, each of these groups market to a different kind of far right ideologue. Identity Europa markets to young, college educated, disaffected white men and is very much in the vein of David Duke in wrapping up far right imagery in the trappings of respectability for mass consumption. The 3%ers and the Neo-Confederates, as well as the Ku Klux Klan, to some degree, market to a more militant audience that wishes to build far right militias outside of the rule of law. While 3%ers and Neo-Confederates don't go far beyond that, The Ku Klux Klan is and always has been an alt-right terrorist organization. In this era, these groups are all willing to work together for a common, shared goals, which is of course the most worrying part about them.

**Elliot: Where can readers turn to for more information?**

**David:** I always suggest keeping up with the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-defamation League. Other good websites are Hate Watch and Right Wing Watch, which track the movements of the political right. A source you might not have heard about is Unicornriot.com. It's an independent investigative journalist outfit that really does a good job keeping track of, not only the real world movements, but also infiltrating and revealing discord servers and their contents. It is also not hard to find information about some of these movements, such as their symbols hand signs and common tactics, on the Southern Poverty Law Center website.

**Elliot: What are some practical tips if we see signs of these groups around? How can the trans community stay safe? Who can we report incidents to?**

“IN A SENSE, I ENTERED THIS FIELD IN ORDER TO KEEP MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY SAFE.”

**David:** Practical tips to stay safe include going to new places in groups, always be with a friend during a public events, don't be caught alone in an unknown area at night, and always stay with the crowd at any sort of political function. Beyond just locking your door, you can make sure that your social media profiles do not give specific locations for things like where you live and where you work. I always recommend setting social media profiles to private.

If there is an incident that involves a hateful person or a hate group, I always recommend relying on the trans community for support. In general, your fellow members of the LTA and the broader LGBT community are your most effective sources of camaraderie. I want to see the LTA grow to a point where it would be able to support its members during one of these incidents by itself, or without primarily relying on outside organizations. Safety comes from a united community.

**Elliot: Are there any other resources that can be of use to the trans community?**

**David:** I have mentioned a few websites and of course the LTA, but the most important resources will always be the people around you. The most important thing for 2019 is for members of the trans community to develop close personal ties with other communities and individuals. Should the rise of the far right continue, we will need everyone to be aware and tune in to the struggles that the trans community will face and has faced. Your most important resource is your social bubble, the people around you who care about you and will go out of their way for you. We need to build a broad coalition of individuals and groups that are dedicated to the safety of all minorities. If we were to develop that, the far right would stop making gains. In this sense, a perfect defense becomes the offense, and as we create a safer world for us, we will make it safer world for others.

“IDENTITY EUROPA MARKETS TO YOUNG, COLLEGE EDUCATED, DISAFFECTED WHITE MEN AND IS VERY MUCH IN THE VEIN OF DAVID DUKE IN WRAPPING UP FAR RIGHT IMAGERY IN THE TRAPPINGS OF RESPECTABILITY FOR MASS CONSUMPTION.”



## RESOURCES:

Southern Poverty Law Center's Hate Watch blog and Hate Map track the activity of hate groups throughout the country.

Link: [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org)

The Anti-Defamation League has a hate symbol database so that you can learn the signs of hate groups organizing in your area. They also track hate crimes nationwide.

Link: [www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)

Unicorn Riot is an independent nonprofit media organization of artists and journalists who expose white nationalist infiltration and amplify anti-racism actions across the U.S.

Link: [www.unicornriot.ninja](http://www.unicornriot.ninja)



# LIVING OUR VALUES

## A COLUMN BY ELLIOT WADE

LTA has been active for almost 8 years. In that time, we've made it our priority to continuously dedicate ourselves to making Louisiana a better place for trans folks in all aspects of their day-to-day lives. As an organization, we've had to grow and adapt to the changing needs and attitudes of our community. This year, we've managed to lay the groundwork to be a more impactful, transparent, and inclusive organization.

At our first annual statewide meeting, we elected our board (listed on page 1). LTA's Board is the youngest it has ever been! Trans youth want to be involved in cultivating change and we want to include them in any way we can: it is necessary to bring trans youth into leadership. In the next few years, LTA aims to fully fund a youth mentorship program to help foster trans leadership skills. Ideally, we'll also be able to have a dedicated office space and a paid staff. All the great work that our board and members have been doing is volunteer-led and unpaid, and we can't begin to express enough gratitude to the people who've been willing to share their time and talents with us.

Embracing intersectionality has been the key to fully serving the community. Here's how we have been working to uphold our statement of principles:

### 1. Self-determination and expression for all transgender and gender non-conforming people is a core human right.

As time has progressed, people have found new ways to best describe how they identify. Not everyone may be familiar with these concepts, but we must adapt. The fluidity of gender or simply not identifying with gender at all are not new concepts. History has shown us consistently that the gender binary has never been as black and white as western society lead us to believe: the construction of the gender binary is a modern one. Non-binary and gender non conforming folk are welcome and encouraged to be a part of our organization. Our census reported that about 10% of our membership identifies as nonbinary (ENBY) or gender nonconforming (GNC).

In an effort to show our support, our VP Alexander Andersen has started an ENBY/GNC appreciation post day on Thursdays in our facebook group. In November, we officially began holding ENBY and GNC support groups in New Orleans.

### 2. Trans liberation depends on the empowerment of intersecting communities that experience systemic oppression, especially people of color, the poor, immigrants, people with disabilities, and women and femme-identified people.

Trans people of color (TPOC) have been systematically underserved in areas of outreach. The results of our census have shown us that nearly 75% of our organization is white. Therefore, it is crucial for LTA to be vocal in our support of trans people of color in our state and efforts that uplift and liberate all people of color. Racism and transphobia combined present a specific breed of violence that TPOC face: TPOC have higher rates of experiencing violence, unemployment, and homelessness.

Racism exists everywhere: even within the trans community. In an effort to keep our community informed and safe, LTA has been working with experts to track white supremacist and/or alt-right radical groups across the state that may present a threat.

In another effort to expand participation in leadership, Alexander Andersen and I have founded LTA's Trans People of Color (TPOC) Empowerment Committee. We want to hear what our community needs. We encourage TPOC to voice their concerns. Providing necessary and TPOC-led training and mentorship to the next generation of TPOC leaders will prove crucial to expanding our reach across parish lines.

In the future, we plan on having all individuals involved in leadership undergo mandatory anti-racism training. Everyone can benefit from learning what forms racism can take and applying that knowledge to their day-to-day interactions. Our leadership should be prepared to interact with and assist all types of folks. Working with the facilitators of this training would also put us in the position to educate other folks! Hosting anti-racism training open and accessible to all members of LTA is one of our long-term goals.

### 3. All trans people regardless of individual socioeconomic status should have an opportunity to participate fully in organizational activities, especially those in under-resourced, isolated, and rural communities throughout the state.

Lastly, we have been pushing to host more social events. Accessibility is always a priority when we consider where to hold our support group meetings. We aim to have them in centralized locations on bus routes to allow as many folks as possible to attend. The holidays have reminded us that community is essential: everyone needs somewhere to feel safe.

The Saturday after Thanksgiving, LTA hosted its first annual Transgiving. After the Baton Rouge support group meeting, everyone enjoyed a spread of all the best Thanksgiving food. The turkey, macaroni, pies, and other holiday staples were provided free of

annual Transgiving. A simple service like this provided a different kind of support that often goes overlooked when we talk about what resources folks need. We hope to bring accessible and fun social events to all of our chapters across the state.

Through fundraising, we've been able to fully fund eight name changes. If our goals continue to be met, we'll have a fully funded youth mentorship program and a paid staff. What better way to serve our community than to directly provide them with access to education and useful skills to move through the world of organizing, activism, and public policy?

Every year offers another chance to learn, grow, and change. Louisiana Trans Advocates will continue to serve our community for as long as we can, but we'll need your help every step of the way. I encourage everyone to attend a board meeting or two, talk to your chapter leaders at the support group meetings, and let us know how we can better serve you. Here's to another wonderful year to come!



**Elliot Wade**  
Co-Chair, Trans People of Color Empowerment Committee  
Board Member At-Large  
Media Liaison

# BREAKING THE BINARY

## A COLUMN BY ALEXANDER ANDERSEN

It was a journey to discover myself to be nonbinary, and I enjoyed the freedom that an accepting place gave me to explore myself and my expression of my gender. I love being trans, because it allows me to understand myself as someone who exists outside of what I used to understand gender to be. When we bend the rules of what is "acceptable" beyond the body that we were born with, we can find true freedom and creativity. With the confidence with I have gained from being involved with Louisiana Trans Advocates I have been able to express myself freely, and the more I noticed that I didn't fit neatly in the male or female box.

Exploring the ways that people feel different about their gendered experience reminds us of the common thread that all trans people share: being uncomfortable with the box that we are put in. Living as your true self, whether binary or not, shows that gender is more complex than the way we have previously understood it to be.

Some of the most fun experiences are in genderf\*cking/genderbending, where you play with the elements that are understood to belong to masculine and feminine identities in combination.

The diversity of gender experience and expression is beautiful. I love describing gender in the Galaxy Model. In the galaxy model, there are identity clusters, like Male, Masculine, Female, and Feminine. These labels for the different sectors of the gender galaxy have a certain gravity to them, where some people gravitate towards these labels because they fit within

the certain parameters. For example, butch and femme women could both consider themselves to be women, but exist with a different understanding and experience in womanhood.

Being able to work with and support trans and nonbinary people has been a great way to explore the diversity of gender with other people who have experienced dysphoria that doesn't fit the "normal narrative" of a trans person. I love that our support groups are a safe place to explore these different expressions and struggles that are outside of the binary trans experiences.

Our online support group has started to become a place where nonbinary people can talk about their gender dysphoria and euphoria. I've started a specific post once a week for enby's\* to get to talk about their experiences and struggles. The first in person nonbinary support has been established in New Orleans, which has given a safe space to those existing in-between or outside of the gender binary.

We are expanding the support that we provide to our binary members to our nonbinary members. This is an important part of our mission, to ensure the right of self-determination and expression for all trans, nonbinary and gender nonconforming people in Louisiana.

\*This is an abbreviation for nonbinary, which in this article is used as an umbrella term for those whose understanding of their gender is not as man or woman. This includes gender variant, genderqueer, pangender, genderfluid, two-spirit, androgynous, nongendered, gender neutral, or other identities that don't fit the binary.



**Alexander Andersen**  
Vice-President of the Board  
Co-Chair, Trans People of Color Empowerment Committee



# CHANGING TIDES

When 7 out trans people won elections in 2017, it sent shockwaves through the nation. Now, more trans people than ever are running for office. But could a trans person win in Louisiana?

Gerri Cannon. Phillippe Cunningham. Danica Roem. Andrea Jenkins. Stephe Koontz. Lisa Middleton. Tyler Titus. Raven Matherne. Brianna Titone. Geri Cannon. Lisa Bunker. Monika Nemeth. Kathryn Ottersten. Liz Lyke. What do all of these people have in common? They're all transgender Americans who ran for elected office and won. They serve on city councils, state legislatures, school boards, neighborhood commissions, and more. But in Louisiana, no trans person has mounted a winning campaign. That could all change this year.

Sebastian Rey\*, a 34-year-old transgender man, is running for Jefferson Parish Council District 2. Rey, a lifelong resident of Jefferson Parish, lived with his grandmother for a period of time during his school years. While there, he had to walk to school on Jefferson Highway, but there were no sidewalks. In recent years, a ghost bike was erected in front of a local elementary school in memory of a small child killed while riding their bike on the same road. After the accident and recalling his own dangerous walks to school, Rey called on his council member to get sidewalks funded for the highway, but the council member cited federal jurisdiction of the road and suggested he take his concerns to his Congressional representative. Neither body took action, and Rey says this is what sparked his interest in running for office.

"Kids deserve sidewalks and safe routes to schools. We already have enough factors keeping kids out of school, and that should never be one of them. Even on issues like this, where a council member can't just take a vote to fix the problem, they should step up, be the lobbyists for our communities, and push state and federal officials to hatch a solution."

Rey is running for a local office with a campaign focused on local issues. Besides safe routes to schools, he says his priorities for the district are to bring municipal broadband to Jefferson Parish, enact policies that encourage young families to take up residence in the parish, and encourage entrepreneurship and the growth of small businesses. He wants Jefferson Parish to invest in a "one stop shop" for business owners to incorporate, get mentorship, and explore business loan opportunities. He also wants to take a good, hard look at applications coming to the Council for the Industrial Tax Exemption Program.

While his trans identity is not central to his campaign, he says it has been a factor in some early responses to his run. "I've been actively discouraged from running at all because of my trans identity. A few politicians and consultants have basically suggested to me that I'm wasting my time, just because I'm transgender. But I don't believe that being transgender is the hurdle that career politicians think it is. It's just something that people in politics haven't seen before, and that's limiting their understanding of what's possible."

Rey jokes, "Honestly, I think my being a Democrat might be a bigger problem for the voters than my being trans."

Rey has this advice to any trans person considering running for office: Sign up for a Victory Institute training. Find out as much as you can about running for office. And maybe most importantly, make sure you have a support system of friends and family who have your back and whom you can rely on to help you stay healthy throughout your campaign.

Sean Meloy, Senior Political Director of the Victory Fund, which works to elect openly LGBTQ people to office across the country, says that no matter the office, a political candidate needs a few

things to be successful. Candidates must run for the right reasons, have a strong message for voters, and have realistic expectations for their campaign.

Still, he says potential candidates don't need to have all the answers to get started.

"That's why we run trainings for potential candidates and campaign staff. Throughout the year, we host potential candidates for four-day trainings that help them gain the necessary skills and strategies to run and win." Meloy says that transgender candidates need to be prepared to face adversity. He also cautioned potential candidates that they'll need a comprehensive campaign strategy in order to win.

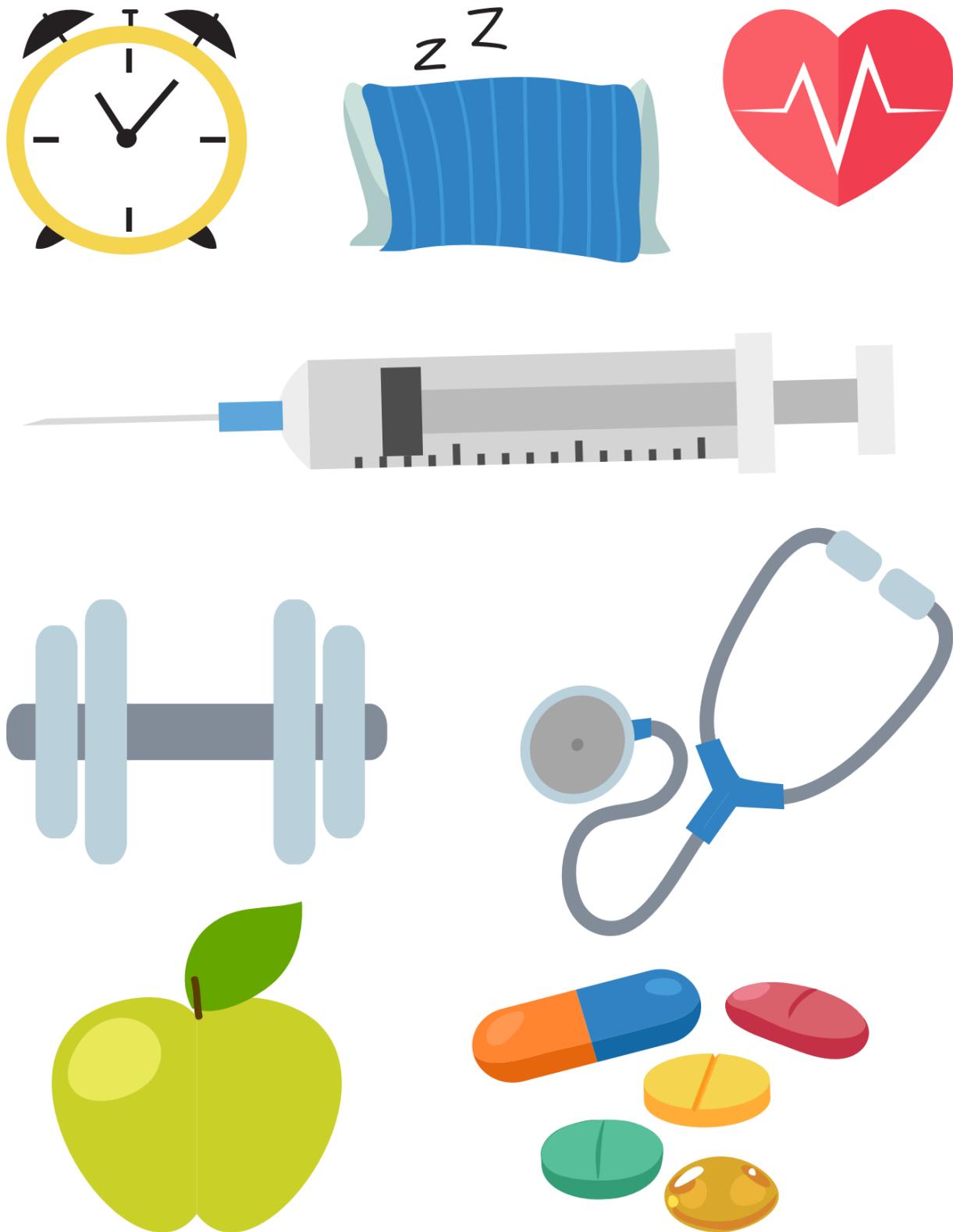
"One of the most common mistakes we see in the beginning of a campaign is a strategy that relies too heavily on building grassroots support. Grassroots organizing and field work is critical, but a candidate needs to fundraise as well to be successful."

Victory Institute is the leadership development and training partner to Victory Fund, and they train hundreds of LGBTQ leaders each year, many of whom later run for office. One of their programs, the Victory Empowerment Fellowship, specifically works with LGBTQ leaders of color and transgender leaders who seek to expand their campaign skills and policy-making power.

So if you have a hunger for justice and an agenda for your community, don't be afraid to explore public office. Get in touch with the Victory Institute or Emerge Louisiana, an organization that trains both trans and cis women to run for office, explore your opportunities, and put yourself out there! After all, as they say, if you're not at the table, you're on the menu.

\*Louisiana Trans Advocates is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and does not endorse, support, or fund candidates for elected office.





# HOW TO HEAL

## Self-care, health and wellness in the era of Trump and attacks on our civil rights.

Audre Lorde once said “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” As a therapist, it concerns me that self-care is one of those phrases that gets bandied about carelessly and is now used to describe everything from bath bombs to overpriced salads at chain restaurants. Truly caring for oneself goes a bit deeper. It’s not that treating yourself to such things is inherently bad for you or meaningless, but personally, it takes more than a pedicure to shake my existential dread at the next horribly transphobic message issued by the White House and spread all over the media like so much icing on a really bigoted cupcake that no one wants to eat. As much as I would like to tell all of the lovely trans people that I know both personally and professionally that it’s all going to be okay, I know that I can’t do that. I’d be lying. Because it’s not really okay. Having the federal government repeatedly attempt to enact policies that would deprive us of our most basic human rights is downright terrifying. I can’t fault anyone for being upset about that. It upsets me too.

When all of these things start to get to me, which happens even to professional therapists, I try to lean on a few things to help me get through it. This is where we talk about what self-care really means. When I work with clients on these aspects of their lives, these concepts can sometimes be difficult to grasp and so I find metaphor to be

a particularly useful tool. My favorite metaphor for self-care is as follows. If you’ve ever been on a plane or even seen a movie where someone is on a plane, you’ve likely noticed that the flight attendants always do pre-flight announcements. One of those things that they always say is that in the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will drop down from the overhead compartments and that you should put your own oxygen mask on first before attempting to help the person next to you. Why is this? It seems only natural to do the selfless thing and put our needs on the back burner and help others before taking care of ourselves. The reason that flight attendants have to say these things is that it is substantially more likely that bad things will happen to both of you, unless one person secures their own oxygen mask first before helping the other. This illustrates the fundamental truth about self-care as well as caring for others. If you aren’t taking care of yourself you likely won’t be very effective at helping others anyway.

This was a very difficult lesson for me to learn both personally and professionally. I was already a practicing therapist and working in the mental health field prior to transitioning. In those early days of my career, as is common among people in so-called helping professions, I wanted to get out there and save the world. I wanted to help everyone with everything and fix all of the problems. It took me years to really learn that I could not in fact save

everyone or fix all of the problems, and more to the point, I couldn’t really be of much help to anyone if I wasn’t taking care of myself. This is one of the major factors in my decision to medically and socially transition. If I was going to be in a position to help clients that came to me for help with their problems, I first had to deal with my own. Learning how to care for myself was perhaps the most valuable thing I have learned both as a therapist and as a human being.

At this point I’d like to talk about some of the skills I’ve learned along the way that help us take care of ourselves especially when things get difficult. The first and most basic thing we can all do for ourselves in at least some way is taking care of our physical bodies. This can mean many different things depending on the person and not all of these will apply to everyone. Physical self-care might take the form of exercise, eating healthier food, cutting down on substance use, not isolating ourselves in our bedrooms for days at a time, getting involved in a creative activity such as art, music, or dance, etc. For many of us this involves changing aspects of our physical presentation, clothing, grooming, or hormones. Even something so simple as going outside and walking around the block a couple of times will literally alter your brain chemistry a tiny bit and help you feel a tiny bit better.

Secondly, let’s talk about compartmentalization. This is another one of those words you’ve probably heard somewhere before, but

it's a vitally important skill in these days of constant connectedness and endless and increasingly distressing alerts that pop up on our phones and news feeds every ten minutes. This sort of hyper-stimulation that we are all experiencing tends to lead to an overwhelming sense of fatigue and the feeling that there is nothing we can do to stem the ever-growing tide of awful coming from all directions. Compartmentalization is something I picked up working in inpatient psychiatric hospitals, which can be very high-stress environments for many reasons that are not worth getting into at the moment. In order to maintain any level of effectiveness at that job I had to learn how to let the events of the day go when I walked out the door to go home. I made a conscious effort to leave all that stress and tension at the hospital and not think about it until I clocked in the next day. In the spirit of this practice, we can use this skill to limit our exposure to these distressing news alerts.

It sometimes feels like we must catch every headline, tweet, or news alert, but this sort of constant vigilance leads to profound physical and mental consequences and eventually burnout. If we get burned out we are not going to be very effective at helping anyone else or standing up to the rising tide of bigoted and transphobic policies this administration is desperately trying to push. It's ok to turn your phone off sometimes. It's okay to not check your social media for a day. It's ok not to catch every provocative tweet or leaked memo. It's ok to take time away from these things to recharge your own batteries. It is vital that we rest and take time away sometimes because this is likely going to be a long fight.

Thirdly we should talk about the voices in our heads. I'm not talking about schizophrenia, I'm talking about the running dialogue with ourselves we all have inside of our heads. How you talk to yourself is one of the most important aspects of mental health. For too many of us the tone of this dialogue is often critical, harsh, and judgmental. Changing how we talk to ourselves, changing the tone of our internal dialogue to

a more positive one has a profound effect on our wellbeing both physically and mentally. Quite a few of us in the trans community deal with dysphoria which is often expressed in our internal dialogue (you're not pretty/handsome enough, you'll never pass, you're too tall or short, etc.) A lot of these things are values that society has programmed into us and we have had to overcome them, to de-program ourselves of these messages to make coming out and/or transitioning a real possibility. We live in a society that is still coming to terms with the fact that trans people exist and often it seems as though parts of society don't want us to exist at all. Coming out, transitioning, enjoying our lives, and being ourselves in such a society is nothing short of a radical act of self-love.

Lastly, I want to mention the importance of community. This is what LTA strives to provide for trans folks all across Louisiana. Being trans can often be an isolating experience. An unfortunate number of us lose friends, family, and even jobs when we transition. We face discrimination, bigotry, and transphobia every time we dare to walk out our front doors, and more recently from the president himself. Through all of these things we must connect with one another and use our community as a source of strength and resilience. We must call on one another when we need help. We must be there for our trans siblings when they need help. But we cannot do it alone. We must do it together. We owe that much to our courageous transcestors who paved the way for us.

The knowledge that we have a strong and vibrant community full of amazing, talented, capable, and motivated trans folks that is growing and getting stronger despite being situated in one of the reddest of red states in the deep south is inspiring to me. Times are hard for us. There's no denying that. But even in the face of such opposition we stand together to support one another. The value of that cannot be overstated. Above all, we must care for and be kind to ourselves and one another because we exist in a society that is not going to do those things for us.

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**"PERSONALLY, IT TAKES MORE THAN A PEDICURE TO SHAKE MY EXISTENTIAL DREAD AT THE NEXT HORRIBLY TRANSPHOBIC MESSAGE ISSUED BY THE WHITE HOUSE"**

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**Cody Smith, MA, LPC**  
LTA Board of Directors  
New Orleans Representative

# IT WILL TAKE ALL OF US TOGETHER.

## An essay on solidarity by Cody Smith, Elliot Wade, Alexander Andersen, Jesse Roessler, and Dylan Waguespack

There are an estimated 20,900 transgender people who call Louisiana home. It may seem like a large number, but in a state with over 4.5 million people, we're less than 0.5 percent of the population. That presents a major challenge in advancing our agenda of lived and legal equality for transgender and gender nonconforming Louisianans. But the truth is that the things we're fighting for aren't just for us. We want the same freedoms and opportunities that the majority of our state is fighting for -- employment, housing, health care, education, and safety. Our movement isn't just our own; it belongs to every Louisianan who wants a better future for the people of our state. This means that we never fight alone. We fight in solidarity with marginalized people of all gender identities.

Solidarity begins with a conversation and an open mind. Allowing others the space and time to express their struggles is vital to fostering solidarity. Create space for those who are marginalized to talk about the intricacies of their lives and to ask how you can help. Learning what people need help with is the single most important part of acting in solidarity. It is easy to assume what would help a community best, but the impacted community knows what support that they need. Being aware of the actual needs of a community involves listening to the community, and putting aside your assumptions of the struggles these folks face.

A baseline understanding of intersectionality tells us that often individuals are marginalized in more than one way by more than one force or circumstance. It is important to recognize that we are not only seen and treated simply as trans people and that there are many other factors present in this equation. For example, there are many in the trans community that also have a physical or mental disability. People with disabilities have had to fight for accessibility to goods and services necessary to their survival as well as equitable access to physical spaces just as trans people have. Many trans Louisianans are living in poverty. Employment discrimination is a real thing as many of us are painfully aware. Living in poverty creates a host of other circumstances that make it very difficult to survive,

let alone thrive in a society that places so much emphasis on socioeconomic status. Many transgender Louisianans are also contend with racism, violence, and discrimination due to their race, ethnicity, or national origin. Trans women of color suffer violence and discrimination at rates much higher than other demographics. As we have all seen over the last few years, and those of us that grew up in the south have always known, racism is alive and well in our part of the world. People of color still suffer under widespread institutional discrimination, which leads to a set of circumstances that makes daily life more difficult than it is for individuals that do not have to deal with such things. There are many in the trans community that are immigrants. They're fighting for their physical safety and to be treated as human beings upon arriving in the U.S., a struggle that the trans community is very familiar with. The struggles of the women's rights movement is another struggle to which we can relate. Women continue to fight for equitable treatment under the law and access to basic human freedoms that have been denied them. There are still many areas in which women are treated differently than their male counterparts and often paid less for the same work. This sentiment can be extended to the larger LGBTQ community and the struggles that they have faced and continue to face.

Many in the trans community often identify as LGBTQ as well. LGBTQ folks often face the same types of discrimination that are faced by the trans community. There are also many of us in the trans community that struggle with addiction. Rates of substance abuse are much higher in our community than they are in other communities. This is largely a result of the all the issues discussed above. At the most basic levels, all of our struggles are deeply tied to one another. We must take the intersectional nature of ourselves and these issues into account in all the work that we do.

If our success was only measured by the trans-specific wins we secure, we wouldn't have many points on the scoreboard and it wouldn't paint an accurate picture of just how far we've come already. So while we continue to advocate for nondiscrimination protections for trans people statewide,

we also work for policy changes that will impact the lives of trans people outside of nondiscrimination. We supported legislation that greatly reduced barriers to higher education for homeless and foster youth, knowing that trans children and youth are greatly over represented in the foster care system and among those without housing. We drafted and successfully passed legislation to allow naloxone, an overdose reversal drug, to be sold over the counter, so that people who use opioids and their friends and families can access this life-saving medication without a prescription. We have advocated for a higher minimum wage, equal pay for women, and authorization of syringe exchanges, all issues that impact trans people. This work makes our movement stronger "and" helps trans and gender nonconforming people.

Historically, trans people have been at the forefront of movements for positive social change. This is because change happens when many people unite for a common cause for the greater good. Trans people cannot witness the marginalization of others without feeling empathy and recognition of the condition of being marginalized. Trans people come from all walks of life, and have experienced how their gender identities intersect with other social, cultural, and class identifications. The struggles of marginalized people are the struggles of trans people.

Solidarity takes into account the different intersections of struggle that people of all marginalized communities face. On our own, we face a massive amount of social issues with small numbers. Issues that affect trans people affect others as well, and vice versa. Our movements strengthen when we work together, not just for a better life for ourselves, but a better world for people of all marginalities. Solidarity is the action of supporting those who have built a movement, and in our context, a movement that advances the causes of marginalized people. By uplifting the voices of other marginalized communities, we are strengthening our communities and support system, as well as giving strength to our siblings in the fight for lived and legal equality.

We're walking together on the path to victory. Will you join us?



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