

For Immediate Release

Why YES On 3 is Crucial to Ending Sexual Violence



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SEPTEMBER 17, 2018 | LOWELL, MA – Yesterday, our organization joined hundreds of others in a rally just 50 days before Election Day to urge our friends, allies, and partners to vote **Yes on 3!** We know that on November 6, the country will watch closely as Massachusetts votes on retaining a statewide law protecting transgender people’s equal access to public places. Yesterday’s rally organized by Freedom For All Massachusetts was a successful action in many ways. We heard compelling stories from campaign leaders, activists, youth, people of faith, nonprofit leaders, business executives, and politicians.

Why are we supporting this initiative? What do transgender rights have to do with sexual assault?

Sexual assault disproportionately affects LGB and transgender people, particularly, transgender people of color. On a daily basis, transgender individuals experience shocking

amounts of violence and discrimination that goes largely unnoticed.

In 2017, advocates documented at least 28 deaths of transgender people in the United States due to fatal violence, the most ever recorded. Unfortunately, 2018 has already seen at least 20 transgender people fatally shot or killed by other violent means. 14 of these victims were Black transgender young women. Yesterday's rally missed the opportunity to recognize these young women and say their names. We cannot forget their lives.



Across our community and country, transgender youth are thrown out of homes and schools, forced to become homeless, abandoned, bullied, and assaulted. LGBTQ/T youth are at great risk for sexual assault---almost twice that of non-LGBQ/T youth. To add, transgender and non-binary people are often the targets of transphobic hate crimes and state-imposed violence. These facts should not only shock us, but compel us to action.



Our mission at The Center for Hope and Healing, Inc. is to end sexual violence in Lowell, the Merrimack Valley, The Commonwealth, and beyond. Our strategies focus on reaching those most at risk and those who have been historically unserved. In 2017, we launched a child and adolescent program to emphasize services and prevention efforts on addressing child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and violence against young people. GLADLY, a program specifically designed for youth who identify as LGBQ/T, provides a safe and confidential space to receive support. Youth can drop-in, come to groups, activities, and events.

In 2016, Governor Baker signed into law a bipartisan law that has allowed for transgender people to receive full access to public spaces, exercise, eat, shop, work, and go to school on equal footing with others. The law has also given transgender people an opportunity to be more visible, to participate in public life, and to share their everyday lives and stories with others. Along with Title IX guidance, it compelled schools to enact policies to protect and provide access to transgender youth.

Shortly after the law's adoption, a small anti-transgender group gathered the minimum number of signatures to put the law — and the rights of transgender people — up for this popular vote on November 6. Now, Massachusetts residents must vote **YES** on **Question 3** in order to maintain basic protections for transgender people. Upholding the rights of transgender people is vital to ending sexual violence because the children and youth we work with every day, particularly LGBTQ/T youth of color, need safe harbor and a buffer to the constant barrage of violence they experience at home, at school, and in our communities. Losing this battle in Massachusetts would mean turning our backs on our youth. We cannot let that happen.

What Can We Do?



1. Know the facts! Opponents of transgender equality are using a story of transgender people being child predators. This is unfounded. A brand new study published in the Journal of the *American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* has debunked the “transgender predator” myth, proving that the belief does not match reality. The truth is that transgender individuals, especially Black transgender young women NEED protection! Do not let this horrific myth prevail. Question any statement using this as a rationale to discriminate against transgender people.
2. Understand that the less power and resources you have, the more likely you are to be targeted for violence. This means that transgender youth and particularly Black transgender young women are at very high risk. It is critical to understand their stories and lived experiences as we strive toward equity, and simultaneously campaign against gender based violence. We wish we had heard their voices in leadership yesterday.
3. **Vote YES ON 3!** The power to ensure that Massachusetts remains a place for equal access for LGBTQ and Trans community members is in our hands. Now is the time for everyone who cares about transgender people — and the future of all people — to step up, and help ensure that the future for ourselves and our children continues to be one of promise, hope, and equality. *To learn more about the YES on 3 campaign and how you can support it, go to www.FreedomMassachusetts.org.*

Our Executive Director, Isa Woldegiorgis stated, “As an organization committed to ending sexual violence and the oppressions that are at its roots, we hope you will join us in this fight. For us. For our youth. For our future.”

About The Center for Hope and Healing Inc.

The Center for Hope and Healing, Inc. (CHH) is a Lowell-based multicultural and multilingual agency with a foundation of social justice and anti-oppression. For forty years, CHH has been committed to ending sexual violence in Lowell and the surrounding communities. CHH is dedicated to the healing and empowerment of survivors and their loved ones through counseling and advocacy as well as the prevention of sexual violence by utilizing education and community mobilization. CHH seeks to reach marginalized individuals who experience higher vulnerability to sexual violence and greater barriers to seeking and receiving help.

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