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CONTACT: Cindi Creager
CreagerCole Communications
t: 646.279.4559
cindi@creagercole.com

TLDEF Observes Transgender Day of Remembrance

New York, NY- The Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF) commemorates the 17th Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR), a day to memorialize all those lost to anti-transgender violence and to honor the spirit and resilience of transgender people worldwide.

TDOR began in 1999 when activists held a vigil to honor Rita Hester, a 34-year-old African American transgender woman who was killed the previous year in her apartment. Gwendolyn Ann Smith organized what has grown into a worldwide commemoration of all those killed by anti-transgender violence. Hundreds of thousands of people across the globe now observe this solemn day by honoring the memory of those who were killed and holding local remembrance events.

Statement from TLDEF Executive Director Michael Silverman

“The transgender community - and transgender women of color in particular - is in the midst of a crisis of violence. The number of transgender people killed this year is staggering. More than 20 people have been lost. Every year the National Report on Hate Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-Affected Communities reveals the disproportionate impact that deadly violence has on transgender people, and transgender people of color most severely.

“The Transgender Day of Remembrance reminds all of us that we must work hard to address the overwhelming levels of day-to-day discrimination that transgender people face, including a lack of employment opportunity and unconscionably high barriers to accessing basic health care. This discrimination keeps people marginalized and makes them vulnerable to violence.

“There is no one solution to the problem. Only a path forward where much work is needed to confront the obstacles community members face so that we can all live with dignity and respect, free from discrimination and violence.

“Many of the most vulnerable clients we serve at TLDEF live at the intersection of race, class

and gender discrimination. The statistics on hate violence remind us how very dangerous that particular intersection can be.

“We have learned that seemingly simple interventions can often make a big difference in people’s lives. Transgender women of color comprise the largest demographic group served by our Name Change Project. We’ve studied the impact of a name change on their lives and know that it helps. It raises levels of employment; it raises incomes; it increases access to health care; and it lowers levels of abuse that people experience, among other things. In short, it helps to move people away from the margins and towards the mainstream. It’s not a magic solution. It’s just one intervention that helps.

“The road ahead of us will be a long one. We’ll be tired and we’ll be angry at times. But we will press forward as a community, knowing that we will all one day be free. We are reminded today that there is no alternative to victory. Lives are on the line.”

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About the Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF): TLDEF is committed to ending discrimination based upon gender identity and expression and to achieving equality for transgender people through public education, test-case litigation, direct legal services, and public policy efforts. Read more at: <http://transgenderlegal.org>.