



National Center for Transgender Equality, Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund Announce Intent to Merge to Form “Advocates for Trans Equality”

WASHINGTON - Today, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund (TLDEF), two leading national trans civil rights organizations, officially announced their intent to merge and create a new organization called **Advocates for Trans Equality (A4TE)**. Once the merger takes effect, Andrea “Andy” Hong Marra (she/her), executive director of TLDEF, and Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen (he/him), executive director of NCTE, will lead the new organization as CEO and Executive Director, respectively.

“With double the resources, expertise, and fearless commitment to justice, we will be a powerful national organization to lead the next chapter of the transgender rights movement,” said **Marra**. “Advocates for Trans Equality will show exactly what can be materially achieved when trans advocates come together and seek nothing less than equality for trans people in America.”

“NCTE and TLDEF already have a long history of partnering to fight for the legal rights and protection of transgender people,” said **Heng-Lehtinen**. “Even though we’ve achieved many victories over that time, it feels like it was just a warm-up for the journey ahead. With a record number of attacks on trans people and trans rights, now is the time to unite and use our combined power and influence to advance trans equality in bigger and bolder ways than our organizations could alone.”

By combining strengths into a single entity, Advocates for Trans Equality will be a highly influential and effective voice, ensuring that trans experiences and perspectives guide the national movement for trans rights. Advocates for Trans Equality will house both a 501(c)3 organization that focuses on litigation and public education and a 501(c)4 that will influence policy to fight for transgender equality at local, state, and federal levels.

“Now, more than ever, we need trans voices and organizations leading on the issues that impact the trans community,” said **Shelby Chestnut (they/he)**, **Executive Director of Transgender Law Center**. “In the face of discrimination and injustice, the trans community needs the strength that this historic merger will create. It is an essential step to achieving equality for all. This moment represents the future of the LGBTQI+ movement’s work, with powerful trans leaders at the forefront.”

Advocates for Trans Equality will maintain, strengthen, and expand upon the life-saving policy and legal programs for which each organization is known. It will operate offices in both New York City and Washington, D.C., with staff working across the country. The merger is expected to be final by summer 2024, subject to regulatory approvals and satisfaction of all closing conditions under the definitive agreement.

Formal exploration and merger planning between NCTE and TLDEF has been supported by nationally recognized experts, firms, foundation partners, and volunteers including: **Arcus Foundation**; **Brandie Balken** (strategic facilitation); communications firm **Burness**; **Catherine Corey** (strategic facilitation); design and technology firm **Decimal Studios** (digital); **Deepti Gudipati** (strategic facilitation); **Jacob McClain** (finance and operations); design firm **Pentagram** (branding); digital agency **Rad Campaign** (digital); **Rhodes Perry** (staff support); **Lukas Soto** (staff support); **Roey Thorpe** (staff support); and other consultants and funders.

Pro bono counsel representing both organizations in the merger include **Cooley LLP** (Aaron Binstock, Quay Strozier and Alex Weaver) for NCTE and **Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP** (led by CBT Associates Theresa Kalathil, Christina (Nina) Wlodarczyk, Julie Thompson and Ann Reynolds, with guidance from Partner Andrew Ray; and advised by Employee Benefits Associate Anna Pomykala and Partner Greg Needless) for TLDEF. The law firm **Brown Rudnick LLP** (Peter Willsey and Ethan Lin) was retained for trademark representation of the new organization.

For more information about the merger, visit: www.transequality.org and www.tldef.org.

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The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) advocates to change policies and society to increase understanding and acceptance of transgender people. In the nation’s capital and throughout the country, NCTE works to replace disrespect, discrimination, and violence with empathy, opportunity, and justice. www.transequality.org

The Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund (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. To learn more about TLDEF’s work, visit www.tldef.org

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