

Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance

Fighting for equal rights since 1971
P.O. Box 75265, Washington, DC 20013

Press Conference Statement
Communities Against Law Enforcement Misconduct
National Press Club
May 12, 2015

Good afternoon. I am Rick Rosendall, president of the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, which has worked for LGBT equality in D.C. since 1971. Thanks to Jody Westby for launching Communities Against Law Enforcement Misconduct, and to those who have helped her.

When thousands held a vigil in Meridian Hill Park last August 14 in solidarity with the people of Ferguson, Missouri, a few Metropolitan Police Department officers were on hand to ensure order. There was none of the belligerence we have seen in other cities. D.C. has come a long way since the 1991 riot by police against revelers at the High Heel Race on 17th Street Northwest.¹

Police reforms in D.C. since then have included creation of special liaison units such as the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit, which promote trust and cooperation between community members and police. With allies including the NAACP and ACLU of the Nation's Capital, GLAA helped push for creation of the independent Office of Police Complaints in the late 1990s.²

After the unlawful mass arrest in Pershing Park in September 2002, our then mayor and police chief refused to acknowledge problems until a federal judge ordered the release of an internal report. Then-D.C. councilmember Kathy Patterson, with assistance from ACLU and support from GLAA, won passage of the First Amendment Rights and Police Standards Act of 2004.³

Vigilance, persistent engagement, and data are essential to reform. ACLU-NCA reported in 2013 on a dramatic racial disparity in marijuana arrests in the District.⁴ Given the roughly equal rates of self-reported marijuana use by white and black citizens, the disparity was scandalous. A partial remedy came with Initiative 71, the Legalization of Possession of Minimal Amounts of Marijuana for Personal Use Act of 2014,^{5,6} which is now law. This was not the first time intervention was required. In 1998, we needed legislation to stop the arrest of people for drinking on their own front porches.⁷

¹ "Scenes from the pre-Halloween High Heel Race on 17th St," *LiveLeak*, October 29, 2013,

http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=65c_1383158715

² "Distinguished Service Award to D.C. Office of Police Complaints," Richard J. Rosendall, Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, April 17, 2008,

<http://www.glaa.org/archive/2008/rosendallope0417.shtml>

³ First Amendment Rights and Police Standards Act of 2004, Law L15-352, effective April 13, 2005,

<http://lms.dccouncil.us/Download/4663/B15-0968-ENROLLMENT.pdf>

⁴ "Billions of Dollars Wasted on Racially Biased Arrests - Behind The DC Numbers," ACLU of the Nation's Capital, June 4, 2013,

<http://aclu-nca.org/billions-of-dollars-wasted-on-racially-biased-arrests-behind-dc-numbers>

⁵ "Decriminalizing and Legalizing Marijuana," *Building on Victory*, Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, January 4, 2014,

http://www.glaa.org/archive/2014/buildingonvictory.htm#_Toc410

⁶ Special Order SO-07, Legalization of Possession of Minimal Amounts of Marijuana for Personal Use Initiative of 2014 (Initiative 71),

Metropolitan Police Department, February 26, 2015, https://go.mpdconline.com/GO/SO_15_07.pdf

⁷ GLAA Statement on "Chardonnay Lady Bill," June 1, 1998,

<http://www.glaa.org/archive/1998/dmk0601.shtml>

GLAA supports MPD deployment of body-worn cameras, but we strongly oppose Mayor Bowser's proposal to exempt body-cam videos from Freedom of Information Act requests.⁸

Accountability requires better documentation of police practices. The incidents we have seen in various cities of police confiscating and smashing private citizens' cameras and arresting videographers make it clear that bad practices do not end without a challenge.

On March 9, 2015, a coalition of seven LGBT and allied groups in D.C. issued a report card on MPD's implementation of recommendations from its Hate Crimes Assessment Task Force.⁹ The mixed report, according to the *Washington Blade*, notes some improvements on the Violence Prevention and Response Team, but criticizes the department for deterioration of the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit.¹⁰ There has been no progress in reporting the number of LGBTQ intimate partner violence cases. MPD rejected a request to conduct an in-depth study of anti-trans police bias. Citizens continue to report officers refusing to mark crimes as potential hate crimes.

In 2012, Lambda Legal conducted a national survey of LGBT people and people living with HIV regarding police accountability and government misconduct. "More than one in eight respondents (14%) who had police contact in the past five years reported verbal assault by police, while 3% reported sexual harassment and 2% reported physical assault." "People of color, low-income people, and people living with HIV reported harassment and assault by police more frequently than survey respondents as a whole."¹¹

The most at-risk population within the LGBT community, vis-à-vis police, is the transgender community, in particular trans women of color.¹² Trans women are routinely profiled as criminals just for walking down the street. A national study conducted in 2011 by the National LGBTQ Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality reported that "46% of trans people reported being uncomfortable seeking police assistance—and 38% of black trans people and 23% of Latino/a trans people have been harassed by police."¹³

Respect for law enforcement requires police to protect and serve everyone equitably.¹⁴ Dr. King challenged us the day before he died: "All we say to America is be true to what you said on paper."¹⁵ We believe that love of country demands not self-congratulation but self-assessment and self-correction. This requires documentation of both problems and solutions, and a spirit of cooperation for the greater good. We commend CALM for stepping forward in this cause.

Thank you.

⁸ "Bowser Wants Body Cam Footage Exempt from Open Records Law," Will Sommer, *Washington City Paper*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/looselips/2015/04/13/bowser-wants-body-cam-footage-exempt-from-open-records-law/>

⁹ "Report Card: Status of Metropolitan Police Department Implementation of Recommendations from the Hate Crimes Assessment Task Force and Community Response," March 9, 2015, <http://www.glaa.org/archive/2015/mpdlgbtreportcard0310.pdf>

¹⁰ "Report card assesses police response to LGBT issues," Lou Chibbaro Jr., *Washington Blade*, March 11, 2015, <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2015/03/11/report-card-assesses-police-response-lgbt-issues/>

¹¹ "Protected and Served?" Lambda Legal, <http://www.lambdalegal.org/protected-and-served/police>

¹² "Violence Against Black Transgender Women Goes Largely Ignored," Terrell Jermaine Starr, *The Root*, January 23, 2015, <http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2015/01/violence-against-black-transgender-women-goes-largely-ignored.html>

¹³ "Stop Trans Murders," National LGBTQ Task Force, <http://www.thetaskforce.org/stop-trans-murders/>

¹⁴ "When Police Are Outside Agitators," Richard J. Rosendall, *Washington Blade*, May 6, 2015, <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2015/05/06/when-police-are-outside-agitators/>

¹⁵ "The Mountaintop," Martin Luther King Jr., April 3, 1968, https://youtu.be/a11QfRRI_W4