



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **NCAVP saddened and outraged by recent brutal murders of transgender women across the U.S and fears this violence may be increasing nationally**

**NCAVP also concerned about criminal/legal system indifference in some jurisdictions**

**For Immediate Release**

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**November 19, 2008**

New York – As the Transgender Day of Remembrance approaches, a day when victims of anti-transgender bias are mourned around the globe, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) has documented increases in severe violence directed at transgender communities across the country, especially against transgender women of color.

- **Latiesha Green, 22, was shot on November 14 in Syracuse, New York**
- **Duanna Johnson, 43, was shot in Memphis, TN on November 8.**
- **Aimee Wilcoxson, 34, was found dead in her apartment on November 3 in Aurora, Colorado, just outside of Denver.**

Some of these brutal acts of violence occurred in the same communities that continue to mourn the murders of two transgender people of color earlier this year: Ebony Whitaker, 20, murdered in June also in Tennessee and Angie Zapata, 18, murdered in July also in Colorado. Organizations such as [www.transgenderDOR.org](http://www.transgenderDOR.org) and [www.rememberingourdead.org](http://www.rememberingourdead.org) that have helped to initiate Transgender

Day of Remembrance – held this year on November 20 – also track anti-trans murders. They documented 29 anti-trans murders in 2008, a 65% increase over 2007.

**NCAVP wishes to express our sadness and outrage about this ongoing, horrific violence. We stand in solidarity with transgender communities in Tennessee, Syracuse, and Colorado, the victims and survivors, and their loved ones.**

## **Mixed Criminal/Legal System Responses**

### Memphis

Ms. Johnson's murder comes on the heels of Memphis Police Department's brutal beating of Ms. Johnson in February 2008. Police security camera footage of the beating has been widely circulated since June and can be viewed at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6N1Bvlbh\\_ws](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6N1Bvlbh_ws). (Warning: clip contains disturbing material). The Memphis Police Department had been attempting to settle a law suit that Ms. Johnson had filed for a beating she endured while in custody. Former officers Bridges McRae and James Swain were fired only after the video was released, but it is not yet clear whether or not any criminal charges will be filed.

Local community members have speculated that anti-trans bias is likely a factor, not only in the beating itself but in the lack of criminal charges being filed. "This is not the first time the Shelby County DA's office has shown indifference to brutality against transgender people," observed Dr. Marisa Richmond, the President of Tennessee Transgender Political Coalition. "When Tiffany Berry was murdered in 2006, her alleged perpetrator, D'Andre Blake, was released on only \$20,000 bond." Dr. Richmond noted that people charged with murder in TN typically get a \$100,000 bond.

The FBI is now assisting in the investigation of Ms. Johnson's murder. NCAVP calls upon the FBI to bring its full resources to in the investigation of not only Ms. Johnson's murder but also Ms. Ebony Whitaker's. **NCAVP also demands that DA Gibbons bring appropriate charges against former officers McRae and Swain.**

### Aurora

In Colorado, the *Aurora Sentinel* reported that local police have speculated that Ms. Wilcoxson's death was a suicide. But friends of hers insist that explanation is very unlikely given her life circumstances and also given the condition the body was in when it was discovered. NCAVP is hopeful that local police will conduct a thorough investigation that takes into account these statements from people who knew her.

### Syracuse

In Syracuse, Sage Upstate and other local community members report that Syracuse City Police Department Chief Gary Miguel has responded to this crime with sensitivity. The family of Latiesha 'Tiesh' Green and LGBT advocates in the Syracuse community are hopeful that the Onondaga County District Attorney's office will be able to include hate crime charges in the prosecution of this case.

NCAVP commends district attorneys and police who identify and appropriately categorize hate-motivated violence. We are hopeful that district attorneys and law enforcement in other jurisdictions will follow suit and NCAVP will continue to monitor the violence against transgender communities, as well as the police response.

**Transgender and gender non-conforming people experience violence and harassment everyday and most of it never makes headlines. NCAVP encourages LGBT people experiencing any form of hate violence, harassment, vandalism, or bullying to contact NCAVP or one of our member programs by calling 212.714.1184 or emailing us at [info@ncavp.org](mailto:info@ncavp.org).**

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The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) supports local LGBT organizations in their work to end violence in all its forms against LGBT people and communities. [www.ncavp.org](http://www.ncavp.org).

**Transgender Day of Remembrance is a global event observed on or around November 20 annually that honors the lives and mourns the deaths of transgender and gender nonconforming people who were killed around the world because of anti-transgender bias. To find a vigil near you, go to [www.TransgenderDOR.org](http://www.TransgenderDOR.org).**

A note to journalists from NCAVP:

NCAVP applauds the attention that some of these incidents are receiving in the local and national press and encourages continued coverage. Many news outlets have made a sincere effort to portray victims fairly, but we are saddened by some of the mischaracterization of transgender people by some news sources. NCAVP member organizations work with victims everyday who are struggling to heal from trauma in the face being blamed for the violence they experience at the hands of someone else. We encourage journalists to use language that is both un-biased, accurate, and based on the individual's self-described identity, in covering incidents related to anti-LGBT violence.

NCAVP recommends the following when reporting about transgender people

- Avoid referring to transgender people as “biologically a (man or woman).” The term “transgender woman” is an appropriate term to use for someone who identifies as a woman but was assigned the male gender at birth and the term “transgender man” is appropriate to use for someone who identifies as a man but was assigned the female gender at birth. Specific discussions or questions about the genitals of a transgender person are almost never appropriate.
- Avoid sensationalizing the very difficult and personal decision that many transgender people are faced with about how or when to disclose personal information about their genitals to a potential sexual partner. Examples of sensationalizing language include: “sexual secret,” “shocking secret,” “duped,” “fooled,” “shocking discovery,” to name a few.
- Avoid justifying “the trans panic defense” in news articles (i.e. avoid statements such as “his uncontrollable rage stemming from the discovery that she was really a man”). Much like “gay panic,” which many defendants of anti-gay violence have used (violence resulting from a man being hit on by another man, for example), such statements sound very victim-blaming and imply that the violence was excusable or understandable.
- Avoid victim-blaming phrasing, such as: “Police believe that the woman may have been attacked because her sexual orientation.” Instead, pair the action with the actor: “Police believe the suspect may have attacked the victim out of anti-gay bias.”
- And lastly, it is considered best practice to refer to someone with the **name, pronouns**, and the **gender they identify** (or identified with when alive) rather than their legal gender or the gender they were assigned at birth.

For questions relating to these tips, contact [info@ncavp.org](mailto:info@ncavp.org) or 212.714.1184.