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Activist Nicole Denson. Courtesy photo.

# Activist Nicole Denson on Creating Brave, Safe Spaces

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Nicole Denson is the kind of person who would rather talk policy with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer than have her picture taken with Michigan's semi-celebrity chief executive. And she had just that opportunity at a Planned Parenthood stakeholders meeting where Denson was one of the only people of color. That was part of the problem. Denson's message: the needs of Detroiters, particularly Black women experiencing violence and sexual violence, were not being met. Whitmer asked Denson to leave her contact information with the governor's assistant.

"I was there with elected officials and there were all these people," Denson recalled. "But it did not deter me. I knew I had to get these people to listen."

As a result, "I got invited to more meetings," she said with a laugh.

Not afraid of entering uncomfortable spaces and speaking her truth, Denson recently launched a business, Mosaic Collective. Separately, she was also appointed to Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan's board of directors.

Mosaic Collective, whose mission is to advocate within and for BIPOC communities, is a business developed to foster education around marginalized communities through training, advocacy and outreach led by members of the BIPOC community. BIPOC is an acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

Her experience with the governor was but one example of how Denson zeroes in on an issue, breaks it down and tackles it.

"Sometimes in these spaces and you're the only Black ... or you're the only queer person, speaking up against injustice, it can feel heavy," she said. "And that's how [I envision] Mosaic ... I really wanted us to use our collective power."

A recognized expert in providing advocacy to the most marginalized groups, Denson has been awarded for her efforts in ending violence in the BIPOC and LGBTQ communities.

"I identify as a proud, Black, queer and intersectional activist," explained Denson, who was born, raised and currently lives in Detroit. "So when I launched [the business] in 2019, it was after a long road. After my experience as program director at one of the largest advocacy programs in Michigan [where] I got to interact across Michigan and across the country, frankly, I saw the lack of BIPOC in these [leadership] positions. And to me, I think 2020 by itself has taught us, that the only way to effectively end violence and intergenerational trauma is to create brave and safe spaces for BIPOC individuals.

"I want Mosaic to be a foundation, a place where you can experience radical self-love, meaning that in order for us to [experience] liberation together, we have to love ourselves first," Denson continued.

Invited to feature her business at an LGBTQ holiday pop-up shop in December, Denson sounded pleased with the results.

"I wanted to actually uplift and showcase nonprofits and also LGBTQ BIPOC businesses. And so when they asked me I thought it would be a great opportunity for Mosaic Collective, yet I also wanted to highlight my close friend Rhiannon Chester."

Chester's business, Undercurrent Healing Arts, offers such alternative healing modalities as Reiki and crystal healing. The self-love kits she put together were very popular, Denson said.

"So I sold [the kits] at the pop-up shop. And it was wonderful. We did it socially distanced, by the way. We did not want to cancel it; we had to be creative once again. I wanted the proceeds to go Trans Sistas of Color Project Detroit because I know that they're doing life-savings services, which they've done throughout the pandemic."

## Mentoring and Motherhood

One reason Denson wanted to launch Mosaic Collective was her desire to be a mentor again. She spoke about mentorship: on having them and on being one.

"My first mentor was of course my mother," Denson said. "My mother reminds me of like the straight version of Ruth Ellis. And what I mean by that is, early on, my mom opened up her doors to her friends, her family. ... My house was seen as a safe haven for a lot of people. Unfortunately, not myself so to speak, in many different aspects."

A retired health care provider, Denson's mother modeled unconditional love.

"She discusses working through an AIDS pandemic and all of these things, and so it really showed me that you can help a person and not try to change who they are, who they love," she said.

Denson also spoke of a mentor with whom she worked at the domestic violence shelter Haven. Later, they worked together at Detroit's 12th Precinct. It was at that time that Denson first came out professionally.

"I didn't even know it then but I was in an abusive relationship," Denson said. "She was a mentor to me because I was still trying to help people, yet I didn't find my voice yet. And watching her navigate being a caregiver, being a mother, running support groups, doing PPOs, all these things — I was like, 'If this Black woman is fighting, I've got to fight with her.'"



Denson (second from right), alongside fellow LGBTQ activists. From left to right: Ka’Juan Hill, Jey’nce Poindexter, Dani Woods, TJ Rogers. Courtesy photo.

When she came out, “My mentor did not change her love for me,” Denson said.

Not only that, Denson was able to create “programming for us and by us,” that is, the LGBTQ community.

“That’s what mentorship looks like,” Denson said. “It’s creating a navigational system. A foundation, then moving out of the way.”

That’s what good parenting can look like, too. As the single mother to a 7-year-old daughter, that fact influences how Denson approaches her work.

“There’s definitely still some stigma in 2020 about [LGBTQ people] being parents. About us being able to effectively take care of our children. A lot of people question our morals, question who we love. And that’s heartbreaking.

“I don’t think about just now,” Denson continued. “I think about 10 years, 15, 20 — I think about legacy. She’ll see in action how Mommy continues to get up no matter what obstacles she faces. She continues to speak out. I can’t stop or give up because she’s watching. But so are the naysayers with all of us. They’re watching. And we’re gonna keep going.”

## Planned Parenthood and Beyond

Denson’s daughter will also be watching her mother in her new role as a Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan board member.

Part truth and part rumor, Margaret Sanger’s beliefs on race and eugenics have left many people of color wary of Planned Parenthood, the organization Sanger founded. But that’s not the Planned Parenthood of today. And Denson is making every effort to center her advocacy work there not just on BIPOC issues but LGBTQ ones, too.

“The wonderful thing is that Planned Parenthood has heard me,” Denson said. “And Planned Parenthood has heard us.”

In her over 20-year career in activism, as a volunteer, advocate, facilitator and director, “I never felt that there was room for me on [a] board of directors,” Denson said.

Yet now she recognizes how her previous roles, both paid and unpaid, prepared her for serving on Planned Parenthood’s board.

“I just want people to heal,” Denson said. “I want people to heal in however happy,

however joyful way they can and I want us first to go through education.

“We have to educate ourselves; we have to have hard conversations; we have to educate our allies; we have to build community; we have to uplift each other,” she continued. “And we have to do education and outreach. ... whether

it’s dealing with intimate partner violence, domestic violence, sexual violence ... we need Planned Parenthood’s services. Flat out. Like, there’s no way around it.”

Thus far, Denson is excited about her service with Planned Parenthood, where she knows her efforts are valued. She is working with Cassy Jones-McBryde who is Planned Parenthood’s Black organizing program manager who put together a slate of BIPOC candidates to go through the endorsement process. Soon, Planned Parenthood will highlight LGBTQ candidates as well.

“This is just the beginning,” stated Denson.

The year 2020, which Denson called “eye-opening” and “humbling,” has represented a leap of faith for Denson. She left her post at Equality Michigan and devoted her time to growing her new business.

“I think I might be the only Black woman right now, who identifies as LGBT trying to start ... an education and advocacy program,” Denson said. “I know we have Affirmations; I know we have LGBT Detroit; we have Ruth Ellis Center. I am not trying to recreate the wheel. What I will say is there are not a lot of Black women — cis, trans — that are actually doing the work on the level I’m trying to.”

Most LGBTQ activism and advocacy programs are “very white, gay male-centered,” noted Denson, who wants her work to benefit the most impacted in the LGBT BIPOC community: trans women of color.

“Even when we get out of this [pandemic], the trauma from this is going to continue,” Denson said. “And then therefore, we’re going to need a brave, safe space — whether that’s Zoom or whatever it may be — we have to create that and start having those conversations I talked about earlier and try to heal together to create access and opportunity for everybody in the LGBT community, not just certain people or those across 8 Mile, but to all of us. I know we’re gonna be able to do it. And I want to help as much as I possibly can.”



Learn more about Denson and the Mosaic Collective on its Facebook page: [facebook.com/MOSAICConsulting313](https://facebook.com/MOSAICConsulting313)

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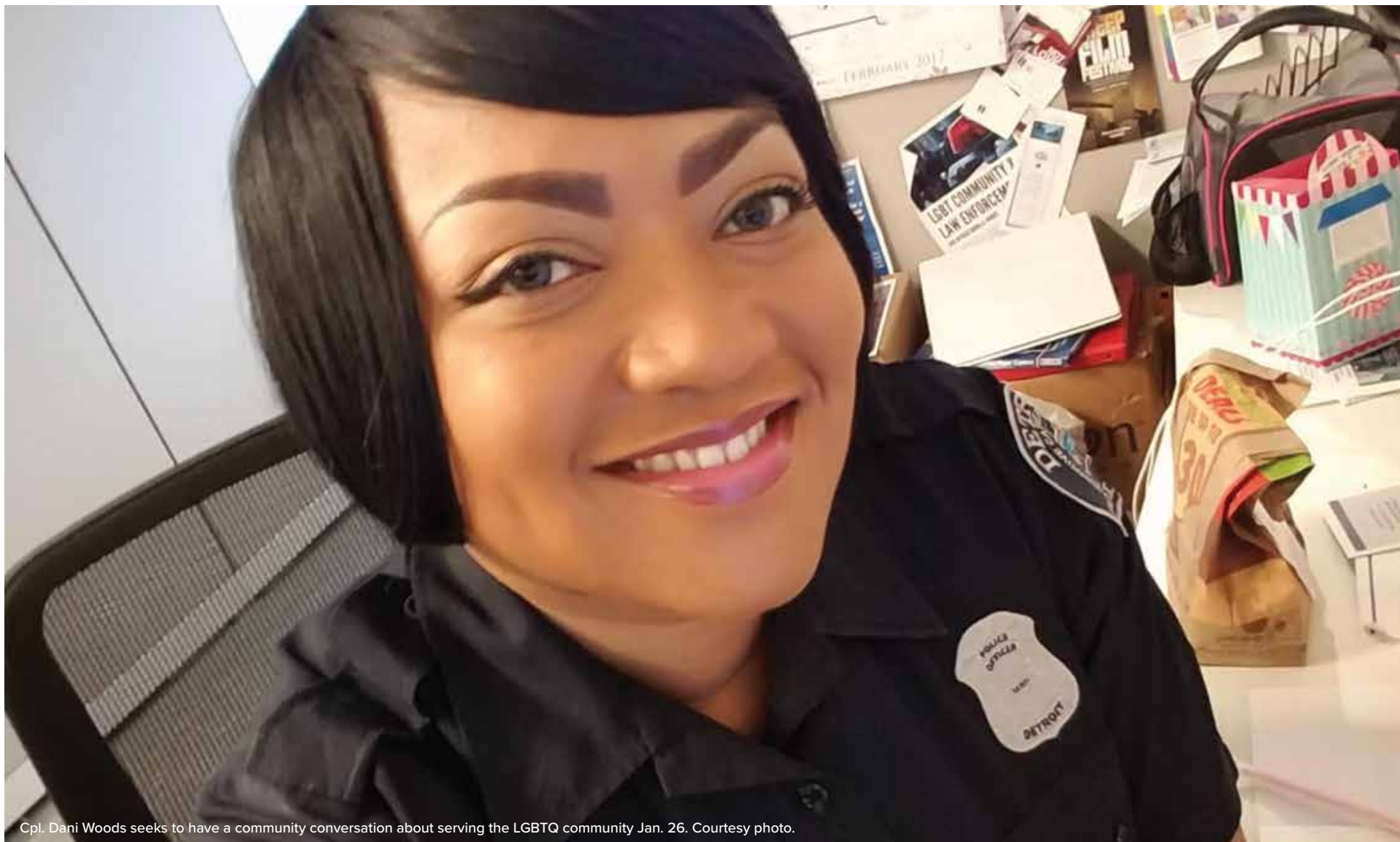
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Cpl. Dani Woods seeks to have a community conversation about serving the LGBTQ community Jan. 26. Courtesy photo.

## Detroit Police LGBTQ Council to Host Jan. 26 Community Conversation

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Cpl. Dani Woods and the newly formed Detroit Police Department LGBTQ Community Council have ambitious goals. Yet the council has already succeeded in convening, organizing and planning throughout the pandemic, not to mention a summer of Black Lives Matter protests. And its first concrete goal is set to be accomplished Tuesday, Jan 26, at 6 p.m. when the council will host a virtual LGBT Community Convo.

“We want to hear from the community,” said Woods, the Detroit Police Department’s LGBTQ liaison since 2013. “So the idea came up that we introduce ourselves to the community, let them know who we are, what we’re about and what we’re doing. And also to take in whatever issues or concerns or even ideas that they have so that we can better build our relationship.”

A group of law enforcement officers, community activists and mental health professionals representing “heavy hitters, go-getters and change agents,” the council is starting fresh, after an earlier LGBT Advisory

Board was dissolved a few years ago.

Woods and LGBTQ activist Nicole Denson are co-founders of the council. They’ve collaborated on community projects before.

“We just wanted ... a different approach to community, because the relationship has flourished since being the liaison — since I’ve been in my position. And we’ve been able to really work together — law enforcement and community, specifically in Detroit,” Woods said. “And so we want to ensure that we keep not just the conversation going but really put forth the actions and create that change.”

### Initiatives

One of those actions includes identifying LGBTQ advocates within, or available to, the DPD.

“We know that social workers [and] victim advocates, they have our ... best interests in mind, but our community sometimes has a different or special kind of need and everyone is not trained or aware of those needs,” Woods explained. “And so we want to make sure we have people in place that

are readily available, educated and understanding on our issues and what it is that best works for us, as LGBTQ members.”

Another line item on the council’s list is the accurate collection of data. Woods explained what that means in terms of the LGBTQ community. For one thing, she said, sometimes in reporting people are misgendered. For another, an accurate account of the community can result in locating grants or other funds available for LGBTQ people.

“With accurate data, we’ll be able to service our community members and also have hard numbers to combat certain crimes,” Woods said. “You know, whether it’s happening communally or against trans women of color or within domestic relationships, we just want to be able to properly pinpoint the data that happens to our community.”

Woods further explained why that accuracy is especially critical at a time when crimes against the LGBTQ community are often mischaracterized or misunderstood.

“People seem to think that hate crimes are paramount,” Woods said. “Whenever people

think of the LGBTQ community they say, ‘Oh my God, how many hate crimes have happened?’ And bias-driven crimes. And I’m like, ‘They’re here and there, but the highest percentage of calls regarding the LGBTQ community are domestic violence.’ And I think that people forget about that.”

The key is ensuring that resources are available to people who need them.

“And if there is a shelter or any kind of counseling or support group, we want to be able to say, ‘Hey, here are the numbers, so this is why we need this.’ That’s an example of why we need hard numbers,” she said.

The council would also like to see an LGBTQ liaison in each precinct.

“I think the community is very familiar with me, and it’s not to say I’m stepping away or I won’t be around,” Woods said. “However, this just gives the community another reach, another resource and another face, because the department is very supportive of what we’re

See **Dani Woods**, page 9

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Woods' first identified co-liaison is 25-year veteran Police Officer Angelica Robinson. Courtesy photo.



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### → Dani Woods

Continued from p. 6

doing. But I want this community to see more than just me. And this helps us to better, once again, get hard numbers and follow up even more and give that personal attention to community members because I can only do so much.”

According to Woods, Chief of Police James Craig has been supportive of every one of their proposed initiatives thus far. Woods’ first identified co-liaison, 25-year veteran Police Officer Angelica Robinson, joined the phone interview conducted for this story.

“I’m a strong believer of the community as well as part of the community,” Robinson said. “But I also believe in fairness, equality, everything across the board and being able to help out in any way I can in regards to building that rapport and trust back with the police department.”

### Taking Action

Building trust between law enforcement and the community is key, something that the BLM protests over the summer brought into painfully sharp focus. Woods spoke on what those events have to do with the goals of the council.

“Some of our own community members were in those protests,” Woods acknowledged. “And it’s definitely understood why. It’s about the how and the what; the when is yesterday. So, we need it now: certain services, certain resources. And what can we do as public servants or as community to make that happen?”

These issues loom large over police departments across the nation, but Woods offered assurance that she has a track record for being proactive and a problem solver. She’s not a fan of talking “til we’re blue in the face,” she said.

“We have a habit of that, talking about issues in our own

silos, but when it comes to putting forth the effort to make it happen, that’s kind of where the buck stops. And it’s like, ‘Hey, where did everybody go?’” Woods said. “And so we have a nice council set up ... just ready to make all of these things happen. I couldn’t be happier working with these folks.”

### What to Expect

The Jan. 26 Community Convo will be just that: a conversation, not a panel speaking at the audience, Woods said. After council members introduce themselves and discuss their various projects, the floor will open to the public. Woods said they’re earnest in seeking community input and inquiries on how individuals can help, adding that that’s the type of energy the council needs.

“It’s understood that not everyone’s in favor of the police or want to work with the police,” Woods said. “However, if we can meet each other halfway — because you don’t have to like me to work with me. You don’t have to like me to push for common cause. If we both have a certain kind of skillset to help us get to that, then we really need to put our differences aside, because it’s not about us in this moment. It’s about getting to that point. And that’s what we want the community to know.”

Woods said the police department’s relationship with the LGBTQ community has come a long way since she was established liaison in 2013. She compared it to building a bridge. Yet there is work to be done.

“I always let people know, we’re not claiming perfection,” Woods said. “So perfection we are not, but we are continuously working to build a mutual relationship, not just one-sided. We want to sit in the good graces of our community members, but we also want them to have trust in us, too.”

Learn more about the event and join in on its Facebook page: [gaybe.am/40](https://www.facebook.com/gaybe.am/40).



# Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners Chair Jason Morgan Appointed Northern Michigan University Trustee

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

When Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners Chair Jason Morgan was deciding where to attend college as an undergrad, a lot of people asked why he would want to head north to Marquette. But from his perspective, it was a natural choice.

“When I visited Marquette and NMU, it was the people that drew me there, because they were just warm and inviting and friendly and it just felt like home,” Morgan recalled. “Marquette as a community is one of the most amazing places in the world. From the downtown in Marquette to all of the outdoor opportunities that you have there, it’s just a pretty amazing place.”

Now as a trustee, Morgan will have plenty of opportunity — at least four times a year — to visit his alma mater. Having graduated in 2011, Morgan was a very engaged student, including serving as student body president. He believes that’s an asset in his new position.

“I think one of the biggest things I can bring to the NMU Board of Trustees is that I know the campus well,” Morgan said. “I am excited about engaging with students and staff on campus and I’ve had some experience in leadership positions through the county commission here in Washtenaw County and through other roles that I’ve served in and I think that combination of things will really allow me to do a decent job as a trustee.”

Northern Michigan University’s eight-member board governing board, the Board of Trustees, is appointed by the governor, per Michigan’s Constitution. With general supervision over the institution, the control and direction of all expenditures from the institution’s funds, the Board may have other duties as prescribed by law, such as electing a university president when necessary.

Morgan said many people don’t have a clear understanding of the role the Board plays. Trustees hold less power than one might think.

“Trustees don’t ... run the day-to-day operations of the institution,” Morgan said. “So it’s important to balance stepping in when needed to weigh in on issues on campus but not be overly involved.”

Morgan hopes to help navigate the university through some of the challenges brought on by the novel coronavirus pandemic. Critical are not only the health



Jason Morgan. Courtesy photo.

and safety of students, faculty and staff but also the long-term stability of the institution.

“My ability to [help] is through working with the university administration to share whatever perspective I can share based on my experiences as chair of the county commission over the last couple of years as we’ve navigated the crisis down here in Southeast Michigan,” Morgan said. However, he doesn’t want to be “in the way.”

“There’s sort of a fine balance when you’re a trustee or a commissioner with making sure that you are helpful, supportive and you’re asking the right questions and holding people accountable, while also not sort of impeding the work that has to happen to run the institution,” Morgan added.

As a “proud, openly LGBT person,” Morgan said, “I would love to work with students on campus and get to know them and hear how things are going there. I was a very outspoken LGBT activist on campus.”

At that time, then-Gov. Jennifer Granholm appointed now-Saugatuck city councilmember Garnet Lewis to NMU’s Board of Trustees. She became a mentor


to Morgan.

“Garn was a mentor to me; she’s still a friend today,” Morgan said. “She is absolutely amazing, and she was always there for me when I just needed somebody at the institution who understood LGBT issues and wasn’t afraid to actually talk about them.”

Ten years ago, while the university was supportive in some respects, it could still be challenging for an LGBTQ student on campus, according to Morgan. He hopes that as someone who’s been there both literally and figuratively, students will know he is available to listen to their concerns.

“I want to learn what the issues are today and where there are areas that can be improved,” Morgan said. “Garn was huge with that for me. I remember being student body president and trying to advocate for gender neutral dorms on campus and pushing to have better student conduct rules and she was always somebody who was there to help me when I ran into challenges, or needed to figure out how to communicate things or how to talk about things. And so I’m hopeful that I can be a mentor to others the same way Garn was to me.”

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## Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

# Billy and Miss Nancy: Selma Sweets

**M**artin Luther King Jr.'s 1965 historic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, for African American voter rights changed the South forever. (Or, did it?)

Few know that another King – William Rufus DeVane King – gave Selma its name 145 years earlier. It means “high seat” or “throne,” and comes from an epic Ossianic poem, “The Song of Selma”.

Billy DeVane was the live-in companion — partner, spouse, lover — of James Buchanan, the 15th president of the U.S.

Buchanan met Billy in 1834 while they were both serving in the Senate. They became inseparable for almost 20 years.

Gay historians say there's a strong possibility that Buchanan may have broken his engagement to his fiancée Ann Coleman for the handsome, slightly older Billy. Poor Ann. She died brokenhearted shortly thereafter.

Buchanan referred to Billy's friendship as a “communion.” Washington gossips called Billy Jamie Buchanan's “better half,” and the two of them “the Siamese Twins”.

Former President Andrew Jackson dubbed Billy “Miss Nancy.” Jackson's own wife — a zesty, buxom tart of a thing — was also the subject of much amorous gossip.

Democrat Aaron Brown confided in letters to his friends that Billy was “Aunt Fancy trigged in her best clothes.” He called Billy “she” and referenced to “her” telltale behavior and conversations. There's hinting that Billy may have been a crossdresser.

But Billy was also a highly respected politician, with 38 years of dedicated service in the House of Representatives, Senate, and as minister with portfolio — perhaps beaded — to France and to St. Petersburg, Russia.

It's rumored at the time that Billy took the post in France to quash gossip about himself and Jamie. Whether true or not, he did a splendid job of keeping the French from interfering in this country's plans to annex Texas from Mexico. Things might have been better for all parties concerned today if France had succeeded.

In 1853, Billy became vice president to our 14th president, Franklin Pierce. Billy, who owned slaves, was chosen as a compromise candidate on a pro-slavery ticket. But before taking office he showed signs of tuberculosis, hastening to a friend's plantation near Havana, Cuba, to recuperate and Mint Julep it up in the sun.

For the only time in our history, a special act of Congress was passed to allow King to take the Oath of Office outside

See next page



BY DANA RUDOLPH

# Mombian

## An Open Letter to Joe Biden from a Lesbian Mom

**D**ear President-elect Biden:  
I'm writing you this open letter as you prepare to take office as president. My son was just a few months too young to vote in the last election, but watched it with great concern, for its results would directly impact him and his family. Would the next administration be one that treated his family with equality? Would it view families like his as part of the rich fabric of American diversity or as aberrations?

I'd like to think he has reason for hope. Since this is an open letter, I'll recap one example, though I'm sure you remember: In 2012, you attended a fundraiser held at the Los Angeles home of husbands Michael Lombardo, an HBO executive, and Sonny Ward, an architect. As reported by Jo Becker in the New York Times, political strategist Chad Griffin — later head of HRC — saw you talking with the men's two young children and was motivated to ask you your stance on marriage equality.

According to Becker, you responded: “I look at those two beautiful kids. I wish everybody could see this. All you got to do is look in the eyes of those kids. And no one can wonder; no one can wonder whether or not they are cared for and nurtured and loved and reinforced. And folks, what's happening is, everybody is beginning to see it.”

You said this at a time when the Obama administration was

still officially opposed to marriage equality. Some thought your remarks were a planned “trial balloon” for the issue. Becker disagreed, but said that they “inadvertently set off a chain reaction.” Either way, within weeks, President Obama announced his support for marriage equality, relating that his own daughters had friends with same-sex parents and, “I know it wouldn't dawn on them that their friends' parents should be treated differently.”

Marriage equality didn't hinge on these encounters alone — it was the work of thousands of people over many years — but your remarks were a turning point for the administration's willingness to back it publicly. I hope that as president, you will continue to champion equality for all families.

I am encouraged that you have named two lesbian moms to your administration: Karine Jean-Pierre as principal deputy press secretary and Pili Tobar as deputy White House communications director. And Pete Buttigieg, whom you nominated as secretary of transportation, was asked during his own presidential run if he and his husband might start a family while in the White House. “I don't see why not,” he replied. Perhaps this might happen even as he takes on a

See **Mombian**, next page

## → Mombian

Continued from p. 10

different role.

While their work will not revolve around LGBTQ issues, I hope that their presence will continue to remind you that all parents and our children deserve equality. Despite the progress made under President Obama, that equality has been chipped away at during President Trump's time in office. Even now, the U.S. Supreme Court is considering a case about whether taxpayer-funded child service agencies can claim the right, on religious grounds, to discriminate against LGBTQ people, people of different faiths and others. This would reduce the number of otherwise-eligible homes for children in need and could mean that LGBTQ youth get placed with families that don't support their identities. That case aside, 11 states now allow child service agencies to cite their religious or moral beliefs as a reason to discriminate against someone; nine of them permit it even if the agency receives taxpayer money.

Additionally, on Jan. 7, the day after insurrectionists stormed the capitol, the Trump administration finalized a rule that will allow foster care and adoption agencies, along with other public health and social service organizations receiving taxpayer funds, to discriminate against LGBTQ people and others. LGBTQ populations are among the most vulnerable here. LGBTQ organizations are already suing HHS for other recent discriminatory policies; you could save everyone time and money, while helping those in need, by changing these policies as soon as possible.

## → Parting Glances

Continued from p. 10

of the U.S. But excessive drinking further weakened Billy's constitution, and within six weeks of being sworn in he was dead. Jamie Buchanan was devastated.

In 1850, Buchanan without his beloved Billy, became our only bachelor president. His indecisiveness in office brought the Civil War closer. Lincoln inherited the conflict. Gay historians think Lincoln a possible sleeper bi.

Billy DeVane King is buried in a

To guide you, the Every Child Deserves a Family Campaign — a coalition of LGBTQ, civil rights and faith organizations — has released a set of policy recommendations to set us on a renewed path towards inclusive, affirming care for LGBTQ youth and families, people of color and people with disabilities within the child welfare system. I hope you will take these recommendations seriously.

Equity for LGBTQ families, and all families, goes beyond just child services and health care, however. It extends into educational policy, housing, employment practices and even foreign policy, for we

LGBTQ families exist around the world. There are no areas of your administration that will not touch us, for we are woven into the fabric of the American people.

I hope our voices — broadly speaking, not just those in your administration — are among the many you will listen to in order to guide our country forward. I am not asking you to prioritize LGBTQ families above any others but rather to ensure that your policies include and protect us equally so that we have the same chance to thrive. The more Americans who thrive, the stronger and better our country will be as a whole.

I want the country in which my son reaches adulthood to be one of equality, justice and compassion, not only for LGBTQ people and families but for all. I'm sure that as a parent yourself, you know what it is like to want such good for your children. Please be the president our country, and our country's children, need.

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*Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.*

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shady cemetery just outside Selma, a city remembered today for two Kings and a queen. Perhaps America's first. J. Edgar Hoover, drag would-be, notwithstanding.

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*Charles Alexander is prolific both as a BTL columnist, having contributed 700-plus columns, as a well-known LGBT community artist having shared over 1,000 pieces of art via Facebook. He is a Spirit of Detroit Award recipient and an Affirmations LGBTQ center Jan Stevenson awardee. Connect with him at charles@pridesource.com.*

## Creep Of The Week

### Donald Trump

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

By the time you read this, Joe Biden will be the President and the worst president in U.S. history will be history. Truly hope the door hits Trump in the ass on his way out. Hard. And all of his grifting family, too.

As I write this it is Martin Luther King Jr. day. Lots of folks, including Republicans who have continually backed this virulently racist administration, are posting quotes from Dr. King as if posting an "arc of justice" meme makes you not racist.

Make no mistake, the domestic terrorists who stormed the U.S. Capitol were by and large motivated by racism. Capitol police officers reported that they were targets of racist epithets throughout the attack. But most importantly, the terrorists were willing to risk everything to keep the most racist president in my lifetime in office. Because they like the racism. That's a feature, not a bug. When they say they like Trump because he "tells it like it is," they are really saying they like Trump because he, unlike so many Republicans before him, isn't of the "dog whistle" camp when it comes to racism. He's of the bullhorn variety. And for a lot of people — way too many people — that's refreshing. It's what they've been waiting for. Praying for, even. It's not coincidental that evangelical Christians are huge Trump fans. They love the hate.

I don't know what's going to happen on Jan. 20. You don't have to gaze into a crystal ball to suspect that those who think the election was stolen from Trump will be up to no good — it wasn't. He lost. Also he sucks. And yet, no doubt there will be folks who underestimate them, just like D.C. did on Jan. 6.

I live in Michigan where domestic terrorists planned to kidnap and execute Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. They stormed into the state capitol with guns. Because, and I'm not kidding, guns are allowed inside the building. Because, you know, freedom. Signs, however, are not allowed. The only speech that's free here is "I could kill you so easily right now," which is basically what you're saying when you hold a gun in the gallery as you overlook legislators doing their job. That doesn't make you a patriot. It makes you a terrorist.

So, yeah, if what happened in D.C. surprised you, then you haven't been paying attention. Michigan was basically the dress rehearsal for these creeps.

There have been many arrests of

people who participated in the attack in D.C. And there are a lot of people who are shocked, just shocked, that they are being threatened with arrest.

Case in point: Texas real estate agent Jenna Ryan who flew to D.C. on a private jet. She posted on social media, "We just stormed the Capital [sic]. It was one of the best days of my life." She says that her arrest has made her feel "persecuted" and that she didn't know there was any violence going on, even as she live streamed herself storming the building and saying, "We're all gonna be up here, and we're gonna be breaking those windows. We're gonna fucking go in here. Life or death, it doesn't matter."

"I personally feel innocent," she says. "In my heart of hearts, do I feel like a criminal? No, I am not the villain that a lot of people would make me out to be or maybe think I am because I was a Trump supporter."

And yet she proudly posted a photo of herself next to a broken window in the Capitol with a threat that the media was next.

"I would like a pardon from the President of the United States. I think that we all deserve a pardon," she says.

And then with a look of disbelief, "I'm facing prison sentence. I think that I do not deserve that."

A very convincing argument. She doesn't FEEL guilty and she doesn't DESERVE punishment. Case closed.

She's also upset that her career has been harmed.

Man, wait until she learns what it's like when, say, a young Black man gets arrested, tried and imprisoned for marijuana possession.

Ha ha. Kidding. Because she no doubt personally feels like Black people in jail deserve "prison sentence" in her heart of hearts.

We live in a country that considers mistakes made by Black and Brown people to be justification for the ruination of the rest of their lives. People like Jenna, however, are allowed to make mistakes over and over again. Until they're so used to that privilege that they do things like "accidentally" commit an act of terrorism in the name of a white supremacist president.

I don't know if Trump will actually pardon her or anyone else. It would be a lot of work, and he really isn't into that kind of thing.



President Donald Trump has become the only U.S. president to be impeached twice. Courtesy photo Washington Blade.

# House Votes to Impeach Trump, Makes Him Only President to Be Impeached Twice

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

In a historic development, the U.S. House voted Wednesday to impeach President Trump for high crimes and misdemeanors, making him the only president in U.S. history impeached twice, after instigating an attack on the U.S. House.

The impeachment vote on H. Res. 27 in the U.S. House was 231-197 and largely along party lines, although 10 Republicans, including Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), joined Democrats in voting to approve the article of impeachment. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) presided as the vote was called.

Impeachment proceedings will now head to the U.S. Senate, which under the Constitution is required to hold a trial, a process that will continue into the Biden administration. It will

take a vote of 2/3 of the members present to convict Trump, which may be in tall order in a 50-50 Senate.

Although Trump will be out of office, his impeachment and possible conviction represents a symbolic stand against his attack on the U.S. Capitol and would bar him from holding federal office in the future.

No other U.S. president has been impeached twice. The only other presidents who have been impeached are Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton.

*This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National LGBT Media Association.*



Screenshot.

# Fair and Equal Michigan Keeps Pushing for LGBTQ Rights Initiative in 2021

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Since early 2020, the Fair and Equal Michigan coalition has continued to push to amend Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2021, the group is continuing its efforts. And despite some roadblocks due to COVID-19 and controversy among LGBTQ leaders who are concerned about putting LGBTQ rights to a vote, enough signatures have been collected to be evaluated by

the Secretary of State. If accepted, the language will be decided upon by the state legislature and potentially appear on the 2022 ballot for a final say by the people of Michigan.

With his colleagues, Fair and Equal Michigan Co-Chair Trevor Thomas updated the public on the campaign's current standing via a Zoom meeting last month.

"One, we know that it is a priority for [the Secretary of State] to certify the election that just happened, and now, two, they have made comments of a first-come, first-served process," Thomas said. "There was another group of citizens working to change a law separate from Fair and Equal on another topic. They turned in signatures just before us, so we imagine that the Bureau of Elections will work on evaluating those signatures in the coming one to two months and then Fair and Equal's signatures will be evaluated."

If adopted, the ballot language would resolve a Michigan LGBTQ civil rights issue that has been raging nearly since the 1980s. Thomas said that despite the risks of the petition being denied by the public or reworded unfavorably by conservative members of the legislature before being put on the ballot, now is the best time for the ballot measure to be introduced. He cited the progressive gubernatorial administration that would veto "harmful legislation" as a reason, positive overall public opinion for the LGBTQ community, a necessity for only two Republican votes in both the House and the Senate and petition language crafted to both appeal to conservative voters and simultaneously protect LGBTQ rights.

"We believe that the language we put forward is the best good public policy for Michigan. Yes, it added sexual orientation and gender identity and expression as the definition of sex,

but we also provided an additional definition to religion, one that protects [the] religious beliefs of an individual," Thomas said. "We did this to be crystal clear that everyone is at the table together. Religion is a protected class and we're trying to do the right thing."

Josh Hovey is the Fair and Equal Michigan campaign's communications lead. He outlined the strategy of the campaign, stating that phase one was vote collection and now phase two has begun, which includes public outreach to educate voters on the importance of this issue.

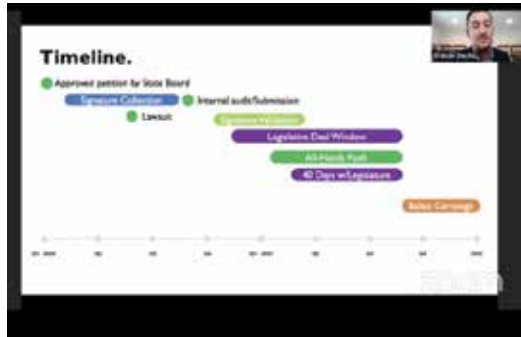
"Our goal is to drive a highly tactical grassroots push of the LGBT community and its allies, including the nonprofit resource centers' individual leaders within the community and national organizations," he said, addressing the Zoom audience. "And you're going to be identifying and activating individuals to take that targeted push during that legislative window that we have to pass this initiative. We'll be providing coaching to make sure you're as effective as possible and that you have all the tools you need to take our communications and deliver them to our respective lawmakers. A high-energy, boots-on-the-ground approach is going to be critical, and it's going to emphasize direct personal conversations that help tell you your story and discreet action steps that are achievable by individuals with your very limited time."

The legislative window for the ballot runs through the middle of 2021's third quarter.

He added that there is a phase three in the planning process as well that will be formally introduced to voters this month. Another Fair and Equal Co-Chair is Jey'Nce Poindexter, an LGBTQ activist who described the campaign as a "well-oiled machine" when she addressed the crowd.

"Let's be very clear: we are full steam ahead," she said. "We're not asking if you think this is legitimate. We're not asking if you think this is valid. What we're saying is that we're no longer willing to wait and we are pushing forward to make Michigan a Michigan that is a place where everyone can thrive and live and work with an equal shot at a fair quality of life."

Learn more about the campaign online at [fairandequalmichigan.com](http://fairandequalmichigan.com).



Fair and Equal Michigan co-chairs addressed their supporters at a December 2020 Zoom update on the campaign's progress. Screenshot via Facebook.

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Biden's LGBTQ promises complicated by coronavirus, impeachment crises.

# Biden's LGBTQ Promises Complicated by COVID-19, Impeachment Crises

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

President-elect Joe Biden will have his hands full upon his inauguration next week with coronavirus cases surging

and impeachment proceedings in Congress, which may complicate his efforts to act on campaign promises to the LGBTQ community, especially signing the Equality Act into law with 100 days.

Biden, however, seems ready to pull the trigger on one LGBTQ initiative: Just before the holidays, Biden's team told LGBTQ leaders in a conference call that Biden on his first day in office Jan. 20 would direct the Defense Department to dismantle the transgender military ban, individuals familiar with the call told the Washington Blade.

It may take an entire year before the Pentagon is completely able to undo the ban, which President Trump initiated by tweet in July 2017.

But after that day one action, things get more complicated. The cornerstone of Biden's commitment to LGBTQ people during his presidential campaign was the Equality Act, which Biden called his No. 1 legislative priority and pledged to sign within 100 days of his administration. The Equality Act would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to expand the prohibition on anti-LGBTQ discrimination under federal law.

Expectations are tamped down, to say the least, with coronavirus infections and deaths hitting record highs, an

unsatisfactory rollout of the vaccines and the upcoming impeachment trial of President Trump, which would bar him from holding office in the future. The impeachment trial alone may hamper efforts in the U.S. Senate to confirm Biden's Cabinet officials, which need to be addressed before significant action on any piece of Biden's agenda can happen.

For the most part, LGBTQ advocates who spoke to the Blade on condition of anonymity for greater candor, were open to granting Biden leeway amid the coronavirus and impeachment crises.

"I think we've gotten the commitments that we expected and hoped for and sought from the Biden team and from legislative leadership, and what that means for us now is holding them accountable, but also understanding that the country, our democracy, and the ability of people to actually live is going to take priority," said one LGBTQ advocate.

The LGBTQ advocate pointed out the committee of jurisdiction for the Equality Act in the Senate is the Judiciary Committee, the same panel responsible for coordinating Trump's impeachment trial.

But the idea that leeway should be granted to Biden on LGBTQ issues amid national crises isn't shared by everyone, and it remains to be seen how much patience LGBTQ movement leaders will have before they start calling him out for not acting on his campaign promises. If the Equality Act stalls out in Congress, the handful of advocates who had called for a LGBTQ policy staffer on the Biden campaign and transition team, may feel vindicated.

"The notion that our government can only focus on one thing at a time isn't acceptable," one Democratic insider told the Blade. "You can't have the agenda and policy goals that Biden does and not have the process to move faster."

Instead of watching the Equality Act become law in 100 days, the bill's supporters may have to settle for having the legislation passed in one chamber of Congress within the 100-day timeframe. One LGBTQ advocate said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has privately signaled she would bring up the Equality Act in the U.S. House early on during the Biden administration, which is expected to translate to a floor vote within 100 days.

Pelosi's office, however, hasn't responded to repeated requests from the Blade since September on when she'd hold a vote on the Equality Act in the next administration.

In the Senate, one LGBTQ advocate predicted the U.S. Senate wouldn't take up the legislation until summer or fall, and that would be only for the initial steps of committee action. Other LGBTQ advocates, however, strongly pushed back on that assessment and said no decisions have been made about the timing for Senate action on the Equality Act.

Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) has sponsored the Equality Act in the U.S. Senate. He told the Blade through a spokesperson he'd continue to push for the legislation.

"The Equality Act is one of Sen. Merkley's most critical legislative priorities for 2021, and he will be urging leaders in both chambers to move expeditiously and seize the window of opportunity to pass this historic legislation," Martina McLennan, a Merkley spokesperson, said.

With the Senate in a 50-50 party split, another wrinkle in the Equality Act is having to overcome the legislative filibuster, the Senate tradition requiring 60 votes to move forward with debate on a bill if one member objects. Would the Equality Act be the piece of legislation that would be the tool to end the filibuster, which has been criticized as a relic of structural racism? Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) has emphatically signaled he won't vote to junk the legislative filibuster, so that idea might be dead on arrival.

If the 60-vote threshold remains intact, the bill's supporters would have to find 10 Republicans willing to vote for the bill, which would be a tall order especially within the 100-day timeframe Biden has envisioned. The only Senate Republican

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who has previously signaled support is Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine).

The offices of Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), the new chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and soon-to-be Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) didn't respond to a request Wednesday from the Blade to comment on the Equality Act.

With passage of the Equality Act in question, LGBTQ advocates are instead renewing calls on Biden to sign an executive order directing federal agencies to implement fully the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which found anti-LGBTQ discrimination is a form of sex discrimination, thus illegal under existing civil rights law.

The Center for American Progress on Tuesday issued a new report, "Improving the Lives and Rights of LGBTQ People in America: A Road Map for the Biden Administration," which makes the executive order to implement a centerpiece in their proposal.

Sharita Gruberg, senior director for LGBTQ research and communications at the Center for American Progress, said during a conference call with reporters Tuesday the Biden transition team has been "receptive" to the requests in the report, but any declined to specify if any timing commitments were made.

"We get the impression that the Biden administration definitely prioritizes these issues and understands the need for immediate action," Gruberg added. "The Equality Act is competing with a lot of other very critical priorities, but again, we have received every indication from champions, as well as the administration that this remains a critical priority."

The executive order to implement *Bostock*, however, wouldn't be as sweeping as the Equality Act because no law bans sex discrimination in federal programs or public accommodations. The Equality Act would amend the Civil Rights Act to ban sex and anti-LGBTQ discrimination in those venues and expand the definition of public accommodations to include retail stores, banks, transportation services and health care services.

One Democratic insider close to the transition team said dozens of executive orders are before Biden in draft form and he'd "sign a steady series of them" beginning next week, but whether or not a directive is among them implementing the *Bostock* decision is unclear.

Another emerging request from the American Civil Liberties Union is an executive order directing federal agencies to update government-issued IDs and to remove medical documentation requirements for a change in gender marker and the selection of a non-binary option, which would be consistent with both Biden's and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris's campaign pledges to allow for a third-gender option.

Arli Christian, national political campaign strategist with the ACLU, said Biden team members were supportive about the idea of an executive order to implement the president-elect's campaign promise for self-attestation of gender and a gender-neutral option on government IDs, but said they were still figuring out details on the path moving forward.

"This executive order would go beyond cleaning up the mess of the last four years and actually move the ball forward on rights and recognition of trans and non-binary Americans," Christian said. "It's a way the new administration can really show that they're a proactive champion of trans rights."

Biden's comprehensive LGBTQ plan, which he proposed during the Democratic primary, also puts additional timelines on Biden's LGBTQ plans. According to the plan, Biden "on his first day in office" would direct the Department of Education to reissue Title IX guidance requiring schools to grant transgender kids access to sports, bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity, which was rescinded during the first year of the Trump administration.

The guidance could be folded into an executive order implementing the *Bostock* decision because they both relate to interpreting laws on sex discrimination, including Title IX of

*"I think we've gotten the commitments that we expected and hoped for and sought from the Biden team and from legislative leadership, and what that means for us now is holding them accountable, but also understanding that the country, our democracy, and the ability of people to actually live is going to take priority,"*

the Education Amendments of 1972, to apply to cases of anti-LGBTQ discrimination. In any event, Biden is expected to reverse the Department of Education's interpretation of *Bostock* under the Trump administration, which just last week issued a memo excluding transgender kids from Title IX in contravention of widespread interpretation of the law.

Another campaign promise Biden made to the LGBTQ community with a timeline in his comprehensive plan was a presidential memorandum within one week after inauguration prioritizing his administration's support for LGBTQ+ human rights and development worldwide. It's unclear where the memorandum stands in the week before Biden takes office.

LGBTQ-specific appointments Biden pledged to name as part of his administration who would help push along his LGBTQ commitments remained undecided, including the White House LGBTQ liaison and the State Department envoy for international LGBTQ rights.

Among leaders in the LGBTQ movement, there's widespread expectation Reggie Greer, who handled LGBTQ outreach for the Biden campaign, will become White House LGBTQ liaison. Greer would have support from LGBTQ movement leaders as an alum of the LGBTQ Victory Institute.

For the position of State Department LGBTQ envoy, one name enumerated by LGBTQ advocates in foreign affairs as a potential contender — and who has support in the LGBTQ movement — is Jessica Stern of OutRight International. Another contender is Todd Larson, senior LGBTQ coordinator at the U.S. Agency for International Development, whom sources say is gunning for the job.

Insiders also said there's talk of naming a Foreign Service officer to the role, but LGBTQ movement leaders have said they don't want a gay white male for the position, and the LGBTQ candidates who could be chosen from that pool are overwhelmingly gay white men.

Jamal Brown, a spokesperson for the Biden transition team, affirmed Biden remains committed to his campaign promises to the LGBTQ community and would act on his first day in office, but declined to elaborate on details.


"President-elect Biden is committed to advancing the most pro-equality agenda in history and his administration will begin implementing that vision on day one," Brown said.

*This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National LGBT Media Association.*

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**Eddie Izzard's Wardrobe p. 21**

# Ann Arbor Native Brian Michael Smith Talks Groundbreaking Role and His Earliest Memories of Acting in Michigan

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Without any positive trans role models, Brian Michael Smith grew up in 1980s Michigan thinking a Black transman couldn't be an actor. He wasn't seeing himself on TV, or anywhere. But now and then, things change for the better. Today, people are seeing him *everywhere*, most notably on Fox's "9-1-1: Lone Star," a spin-off of the "9-1-1" first-responders show, this time set in Austin, Texas.

It's a history-making role: Smith, as Paul Strickland, with a Sherlock Holmes-type mind, is the first transman to star as a series regular on network TV. Before joining the procedural drama, Smith played Officer Antoine "Toine" Wilkins, another transman, on OWN's "Queen Sugar," which was executive produced by Oprah Winfrey and Ava DuVernay. His other acting credits include "The L Word: Generation Q," HBO's "Girls," NBC's "Chicago P.D." and Showtime's "Homeland." In the 2020 documentary "Disclosure," Smith spoke about the historical evolution of trans depiction and representation in media alongside other Hollywood trans influencers and icons, including Laverne Cox and "Matrix" filmmaker Lilly Wachowski.

Smith is now the change he yearned to see as a kid, when he'd cut through the woods of Ann Arbor with friends to get to school, acting out scenes from movies and cartoons on the way. And hoping that, one day, the rest of the world would accept him as he is.

## What kind of kid were you?

I was such an Ann Arbor kid. I would spend so much time outside. I was born in '83, so "Stranger Things" is a lot like how I spent my afternoons. I had a core group of four friends and we would just get together after school and go play in the woods. Go walk in the woods to get to a certain playground, or go to the woods, just to go to another neighborhood; get in some mischief, knock over garbage cans, bike away. I was one of those kids. (Laughs.)

## Did you know then that you wanted to be an actor?

Yeah, I loved to perform. My mom and her sisters all had kids around the same time and then they lived together for a while. They liked to get together and tell stories and have us tell stories, so it'd be a lot like, "Come here and do your thing."

It was fifth grade when I wrote a play, and what was really cool was I got a chance to write this character. I (introduced) my

character on stage, with all the attention on me, and nobody challenged that. That was really powerful for me. Because when I was really little, I was telling people, "I'm a boy, I'm a boy," and you know, having to defend myself when I would say that. So I liked having that transformative power that I could be whoever I wanted to be when I was performing. When I went to school, I was only getting these female roles given to me in class and thought, "I don't know if I'm going to be able to do this."

## What was your experience growing up in Ann Arbor knowing you identified as a boy?

I didn't even know much about queerness or queer identity. But I was able to be myself. I played football on the boys team at Pioneer (High School). I scored a touchdown, and I'm technically the only female in the state of Michigan history to ever score a touchdown in football on varsity. I say that distinctly because it was Ann Arbor.

I remember how afraid I was when I was crossing that giant parking lot to go to the football practice field for tryouts that first day and thinking, "They're gonna say no, I'm going to have to really fight for this." So I walked right up to the coach and said, "I'm here to play football." He goes, "OK, the equipment's over there; go check in with that guy." And the freshmen are up on the upper field and I'm like, "Oh, shit." I think that was a uniquely Ann Arbor experience, the lack of resistance.

## You've blown up in the last few years. Does this feel like a breakthrough moment for you?

Absolutely. It feels incredible because a lot of what I wanted for myself has manifested this year. And it's been kind of a challenge because this started to blossom the most (last) January and February. I was riding this wave after I got booked (on "9-1-1: Lone Star") in September of 2019. We were filming and so much of what I wanted to experience, things that I sacrificed for the past 11 years, all this hustling and grinding in New York, started to come to fruition. Then the pandemic hit. So it's been challenging for me because I know how many people are going through what I would have been going through had this pandemic hit my life in 2018.

## How did you get involved in "Lone Star"?

I was talking to a friend of mine at this event and I'm just like, "Oh, man, I'm having a good time and I'm performing but it's not exactly what I want. I want to be a series regular on an action-oriented show." I swear to God that

On TV, the Hero Is a

**Black  
Transman**

Photo: Fox



as I'm talking to him, he goes, "Say what you want." And as soon as I stopped talking I got an email from my agent: "Hey, you got an audition for the '9-1-1' spinoff." Then I read the character breakdown and it's like, "Trans, roughneck, from Chicago, Midwest." I was geeked! It checked all the boxes.

**When I watched the pilot, I was really blown away that I was watching something as LGBTQ-inclusive as this, a show that feels like something my Midwestern mom and dad would watch, on Fox.**

Yes, that's the thing. That *is* the thing. It's an honor, for sure, to be working on "The L Word" and to bring that kind of authentic representation into a show that didn't necessarily have the greatest history with transmasculine representation. But it's a Showtime show. I grew up watching network prestige dramas. I'm a huge fan of these cop dramas and medical dramas, and I'm aware that that's what people gather around. Those are the fireside chats. These go to the homes in the Midwest. You have to look for "Queen Sugar." You have to look for "The L Word." But this is on Fox. This is going to reach so many people who may not ever have an opportunity to see anyone like this.

**There's a built-in audience for this kind of show already, and then they see a Black transman playing a Black transman on a network TV show getting to be as heroic as a cis white man gets to be on these kinds of shows. What does that feel like?**

It feels right *and* unreal, at the same time. Unreal given that I came from the Midwest and I never even knew that there were other people like me until I was 20. In the generation that I came up in, everything had to be a secret. So I was thinking for a long time that I'm not going to be able to do what I want to do: performance, being an actor and being fully myself. Then slowly I came to realize, because of trailblazers that went before me like Laverne Cox, that, "Wait, we can. And maybe I can be a trans actor *and* maybe I can play a trans character. And not just a trans character who's a victim or the butt of a joke, or a villain, or a side character. A whole series regular." That was only six years ago.

**What can other writers and creators learn from the way "Lone Star" depicts its trans character?**

I think they do a great job of listening to trans people. There isn't a trans writer in the room right now, but they've listened to the input that I have. It's also part of the Ryan Murphy universe, so I think they learned a lot from the "Pose"

experience and how having actual trans voices and listening to other trans consultants and showrunners is what brings the authenticity to a role. Then writing to the humanity of the character and not just what feels sensational about them. The character can just happen to be trans. They can be all these other things, and that is just a part of who they are.

**What can you say about Paul's character arc this season?**

We get to know a lot more about Paul in this season that I'm excited about. What's great is they've sort of built in the timeline, so time has passed and because of the quarantine the team is spending even more time together than they would just being firefighters who work 48-hour shifts together. They've changed up even how we respond to calls based on what COVID protocols would be.

**What about Paul's personal life and romantic life?**

To be honest, what I know about his personal life so far is... I think dates are happening. I haven't seen anything OK'd yet, but we get to know more about his family life, which is interesting.

**Would you like to see Paul with a romantic interest?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah! Come on! Paul's been getting in shape! He's got his quarantine body together! (Laughs.)

**When interviewing for the job in the first season, you tell the firefighter captain that being trans means you've had to be a step ahead of everyone simply because you're trans, for survival purposes. Was that true for you in your own life as well?**

I think to some degree, yeah. I didn't know if I knew any trans people growing up. For a long time, I thought I was the only one. And the only real representation I had of an actual trans person was Brandon Teena, and he was murdered. And it was by people he trusted, or tried to trust. So I think in the back of my mind I've probably always had that: "How much of this do I need to protect?" So yeah, just reading people, keeping an eye on people.

I grew up in a very Southern Baptist traditional household and a very heteronormative space, so when I did start to hear even just the word "gay" it was in the negative connotation that kids use in middle school. On talk shows and in tabloids all I saw were negative depictions of transwomen. I didn't know an actual transman existed

See **Brian Michael Smith**, page 19

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# 'Family of Artists' Unite for The Ark's 44th (Virtual) Folk Festival

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Like most entertainment venues in the state and, indeed, across the country, The Ark in Ann Arbor has struggled to find its footing in the midst of a pandemic that continues to rage.

"Ever since The Ark shut its doors in March to help flatten the curve of the pandemic in Michigan, our focus has been on how we can continue to deliver our mission and maintain the connection with our music community," said Marianne James, The Ark's executive director. "It became clear that holding a live in-person event on the scale of the Ann Arbor Folk Fest would not be possible for January 2021. But our staff was all in agreement that a folk fest was needed now as much as ever."

So, said James, canceling the event, which is scheduled for Friday, Jan. 29 and Saturday, Jan. 30, was not an option.

"For 43 years the festival has been a constant and it felt too important to skip this year. A virtual festival was going to be our opportunity to have the show go on."

In many regards, one might imagine that producing a virtual event would be somewhat easier than a live show. Still, the format comes with its own challenges.

"Our first task was to find the right platform to host the livestream that could handle the technical needs of an event with multiple performances originating from different locations," explained Barb Chaffer Authier, The Ark's marketing director. "We needed to be able to deliver it in a way that matches the high quality of sound and video that our audiences expect from The Ark and the Folk Fest."

Then there's finding the right talent.

"Presenting virtually relies on the artists to provide their own sound and video, so we knew that there would be some limit to who could participate depending on access to filming resources and other technical issues," Anya Siglin, The Ark's program director, said. "We wanted to produce a program that would feel familiar to our audience with a mix of bigger names and emerging artists and showcase the full range of the genres The Ark presents, as we always do, but considering the state of the live music industry due to the pandemic, we really did need to re-envision everything."

Among this year's featured performers will be Kiefer Sutherland, Raul Malo, Dar Williams and more, with Jeff Daniels serving as MC.

"In some ways, putting this lineup together took on more of a personal tone," Siglin said. "Our theme, if you will, since the beginning of the pandemic has been to focus on our 'Ark Family' of artists that we've had a relationship [with] over the years. So many Ark artists have



been vocal about how important The Ark is to them, and so many have been eager to support us and lend their talents. So this festival has really shaped up to be like no other. We have twice the number of artists on the bill as we usually do, both because so many great friends of The Ark wanted to be involved, and because the virtual format allows for it."

It won't be the same as the traditional in-person festival, but it will be as close as possible.

"Of course the livestream experience will never be the same as the live and in-person concert experience," Authier said. "But we've found that people are really needing and craving the connection that comes through a shared music experience."

So The Ark will continue its mission however it can.

"Like everyone across the live music industry, we've lost most of our earned revenue due to the pandemic closure. We are, frankly, fortunate to be able to function at all. Because The Ark is a nonprofit organization, we have some resources that for-profit venues do not," James said. "Our members and donors have been generous and supportive. They've made it clear to us that they want to see The Ark survive. We continue to do everything we can to deliver our mission of enriching the human spirit through the presentation, preservation and encouragement of folk, roots and ethnic music."

And after the Folk Fest, The Ark has plans to continue its virtual performances.

"We will continue presenting our Ark Family Room Series, which is presented free via our Facebook page and YouTube channels," Siglin said. "Donations to our tip jar during family room shows support both our venue and the Family Room performers. We will also continue to present other tickets livestream until we can reopen safely."

*For the complete lineup of the Ann Arbor Folk Fest or to purchase tickets, visit [theark.org/folk-festival](http://theark.org/folk-festival).*



Photo: Fox

## → Brian Michael Smith

Continued from p. 17

until I was 20. The first was Jamison Green on this website, and I saw this fully functioning adult man, a writer, and he's all these things I was.

Then when I saw that transmen existed, I knew exactly who I was. It was this very beautiful, eye-opening, tears-with-joy moment when I realized that there's a future for me.

**During that same interview, the captain says to you, "Somewhere in this town right now is a kid who's just like you were. Feeling scared, hopeless. I'd like you to show him, or her, or they it's OK to be who you are." That's true of Paul, but that's also true of you, Brian. What do you hear from young trans and gender-nonconforming people who watch the show?**

It was that line that really hit home for me. That was in the audition material that they sent to me when I wanted to audition. I read

that line and felt like that was my life mission as a trans person. Knowing I was different and had all these struggles because I was different, I asked myself this question: Why? Why was I born like this? Just why, why, why?

Then I'm doing this and parents are telling me now that they don't feel as afraid for their child because they know they can be a happy, functioning person because of the character and me, the person. Children reach out and say, "You're my hero and I can grow up and be like you." Forty-year-old adults who have never seen anybody like themselves and now feel the courage to be themselves. Well, that's why. That's why I went through all that stuff. That's why I was born the way I was born.

*As editor of Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.*



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# Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

## Raven Goodwin to play Hattie McDaniel in 'Behind the Smile'

Trailblazing actress Hattie McDaniel won an Academy Award for her portrayal of "Mammy" in the 1939 film "Gone With the Wind," the first Black actor to do so. But her career was far from easy after that. She endured Hollywood racism as well as backlash from the Black community for taking on maid and slave roles. According to some film scholars, she also had to deal with the closet. Married four times, she was nevertheless associated with the "Sewing Circle," a group of famous Hollywood women, all lesbian or bisexual, who gathered regularly to socialize, and she has been long rumored to have been involved with Tallulah Bankhead. Now a biopic about McDaniel, "Behind The Smile," is in the works, and Raven Goodwin ("The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel") has signed on to play the legendary actress. We'll have to wait and see the film to know if McDaniel's sexuality is addressed in the film - Golden Age Hollywood was notorious for keeping those closet doors locked tightly - but now that Queen Latifah has played her for Ryan Murphy on Netflix in "Hollywood" (a nod in that direction if ever there was one), we can hope.



Tessa Thompson

filmmaker Ebs Burnough directed the project, and it should go a long way toward reminding audiences queer and straight alike of Capote's vital legacy.

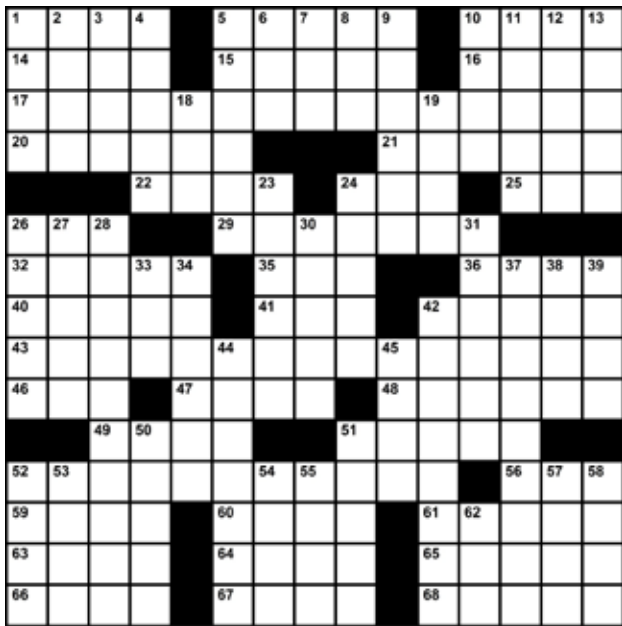
## Tessa Thompson will bring 'Church Ladies' to the screen.

The recently published debut short story collection by writer Deesha Philyaw, "The Secret Lives of Church Ladies," has already been met with critical acclaim and was a finalist for the 2020 National Book Award for Fiction. Now Hollywood has come calling for the author, as Tessa Thompson ("Westworld," "Sylvie's Love") and her newly formed production company have optioned it for a film project. The book features nine stories that explore Black women's lives in the Church and how faith and desire intersect when those desires fall outside of that world's traditionally sexually conservative views. It's currently unknown if Thompson will act solely as executive producer or will also star in the project, as no cast has been announced. But with nine stories to be told, this could turn into an all-star project, so we'll be watching for updates.

## 'The Lady and The Dale' and the history of a trans woman entrepreneur

If you were around for the 1970s, you definitely remember the oil crisis, but do you remember The Dale? It was a breakthrough in fuel-efficient cars. It had three wheels. And its creator, Dale Clift, partnered with a trans woman entrepreneur named Elizabeth Carmichael to sell it to the public. Carmichael promoted the car with gusto, and then everything changed when she disappeared with investor money and eventually faced fraud charges. Now a four-part documentary series, "The Lady and The Dale," is coming to HBO this month. Co-directed by Nick Cammilleri and trans artist Zackary Drucker, the series mixes archival footage, interviews with family members and gender scholars, and animation to tell the story of the car, its designer, and the trans woman who capitalized on innovation and turned her own world upside down. It premieres January 31 on HBO, will stream on HBO Max, and promises to be a wild three-wheeled ride.

Romeo San Vicente is well acquainted with a variety of auto mechanics.



- 35 Bowie collaborator Brian  
 36 Job for Burr's Mason  
 40 "Scary Movie" Cheri  
 41 Callas wooer Onassis  
 42 Baked, to Buonarroto  
 43 More of the quote  
 46 Mo. with 30 days  
 47 Home, to Glenn Burke  
 48 "Murder on the \_\_\_ Express"  
 49 Greek group, for short  
 51 Kofi once of the UN  
 52 End of the quote  
 56 Gershwin of "Of Thee I Sing"  
 59 Lubricates  
 60 Canal of Sal  
 61 Digital dealings  
 63 Becomes wife and wife, e.g.  
 64 Caesar's city  
 65 Alternative to TNT  
 66 On top of that  
 67 Looked at  
 68 Goes down in defeat

- 9 Just out, kinda  
 10 Janis Joplin's "Down \_\_\_"  
 11 Religious reverence  
 12 Singer of "Tomorrow"  
 13 Stays hard  
 18 Fam. member  
 19 Shrek, for one  
 23 Sparkles  
 24 Greek philosophical type  
 26 Cries of derision  
 27 "Grease \_\_\_ word!"  
 28 Places for Mary and her little lamb  
 30 One way to serve your meat  
 31 Nova follower  
 33 Brew ending  
 34 Crash cushion  
 37 Socrates, and others  
 38 British gun  
 39 All-star game side, maybe  
 42 Bread ingredient for Gomer  
 44 Diner sign  
 45 John of "M. Butterfly"  
 50 "The Celluloid Closet" author Vito  
 51 At the front  
 52 "The Music Man" setting  
 53 Jessica of "The Illusionist"  
 54 Rev. Perry  
 55 Martinac's "Out of \_\_\_"  
 57 Disneyland feature  
 58 They have foamy heads  
 62 Way, out east

**Eddie Izzard's Wardrobe** **Q Puzzle**

**Across**

- 1 Lance once of 'N Sync  
 5 "Put roses on the piano and tulips on the \_\_\_"  
 10 Milk-colored stone  
 14 In midvoyage, maybe  
 15 Dorothy, to Em  
 16 Lesbian porn star Hartley  
 17 Start of an Eddie Izzard quote  
 about his wardrobe  
 20 Gaydar and such  
 21 "No need to explain"  
 22 Designer Cassini  
 24 Cold War letters  
 25 You betcha  
 26 Cary Grant's "\_\_\_ Girl Friday"  
 29 More of the quote  
 32 Actor Milo of "Oz"

**Down**

- 1 Clubs for Cubs  
 2 Arthur of the AIDS Quilt  
 3 Stein's "Wars I Have \_\_\_"  
 4 Affirm orally  
 5 Singular type of sex?  
 6 \_\_\_ Tin Tin  
 7 Prefix with political  
 8 Thespians do it

See p. 15 for answers

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888-226-6366  
248-545-1435  
<http://www.matrixhumanservices.org/programs/matrix-mac-health/>

### Macomb County STD Clinic

27690 Van Dyke  
Warren, MI 48093  
586-465-8440  
<http://health.macombgov.org/Health-Programs-HPDC-HIVAIDSCounselingTesting>

### Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLSHA)

196 Cesar E. Chavez Ave.  
Pontiac, MI 48343  
248-209-2647  
[www.olhsa.org](http://www.olhsa.org)

### Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Service (ACCESS)

Sterling Heights Center  
4301 East 14 Mile Rd.  
Sterling Hts., MI 48310  
586-722-6036  
[www.accesscommunity.org](http://www.accesscommunity.org)

## Advocacy

### Equality Michigan

19641 W. 7 Mile, Detroit, MI  
313-537-7000  
[equalitymi.org](http://equalitymi.org)  
[Facebook.com/equalitymichigan](https://www.facebook.com/equalitymichigan)

## Campus

Currently there are 19 organizations listed as active online at [www.pridesource.com/](http://www.pridesource.com/) yellow pages. The following are some in the southeast Michigan area:

### U-M Ann Arbor

Spectrum Center  
[Spectrumcenter@umich.edu](mailto:Spectrumcenter@umich.edu)  
<http://spectrumcenter.umich.edu>  
734-763-4186

### Oakland University Gender & Sexuality Center

[gsc@oakland.edu](mailto:gsc@oakland.edu)  
[www.oakland.edu/gsc](http://www.oakland.edu/gsc)  
248-370-4336

### Eastern Michigan University

LGBT Resource Center  
[emich.edu/lgbtrc](mailto:emich.edu/lgbtrc)  
734-487-4149

### The Lawrence Tech LGBT Resource Center

[ltu.edu/student\\_affairs/lgbt.asp](http://ltu.edu/student_affairs/lgbt.asp)  
**Wayne State JIGSAW**  
[Facebook.com/groups/WayneStateJIGSAW](https://www.facebook.com/groups/WayneStateJIGSAW)  
[wsujigsaw@gmail.com](mailto:wsujigsaw@gmail.com)

## Community Centers

Michigan has eleven active LGBTQ community centers, with a tenth planned in Lansing. Here are three of them.

### Jim Toy Community Center

Ann Arbor  
[www.jimtoycenter.org](http://www.jimtoycenter.org)  
[www.facebook.com/jimtoycenter](https://www.facebook.com/jimtoycenter)  
or follow them on Twitter @JimToyCenter.  
319 Braun Court  
Ann Arbor, MI  
734-995-9867

### LGBT Detroit

Detroit  
[www.lgbtdetroit.org](http://www.lgbtdetroit.org)  
[@LGBTDetroit](https://www.facebook.com/lgbtdetroit)  
20025 Greenfield Road  
Detroit, MI  
Phone: 313-397-2127

### Affirmations

Ferndale  
<http://goaffirmations.org>  
[www.facebook.com/Affirmations/](https://www.facebook.com/Affirmations/)  
or follow them on Twitter @GoAffirmations.  
290 W. Nine Mile Road  
Ferndale, MI  
248-398-7105

## Legal

### American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan

Jay Kaplan, Staff Attorney, LGBT Project  
2966 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)  
313-578-6800

### Fair Michigan

PO Box 6136  
Plymouth, MI 48170  
877-432-4764, 313-556-2300  
[fairmichigan.org](http://fairmichigan.org)  
[Facebook.com/fairmichigan2016](https://www.facebook.com/fairmichigan2016)

### Know Your Rights Project

Outlaws U-M student group  
[outlawslegal@gmail.com](mailto:outlawslegal@gmail.com)  
734-995-9867

## Older Adults

### SAGE Metro Detroit

290 W. Nine Mile Rd. Ferndale, MI  
313-578-6812  
[sagemetrodetroit.org](http://sagemetrodetroit.org)  
Facebook: SAGE Metro Detroit

## Political

### The LGBT and Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party

[Facebook.com/TheLGBTACaucusoftheMDP](https://www.facebook.com/TheLGBTACaucusoftheMDP)  
Stonewall for Revolution  
[www.facebook.com/stonewall4reolution](https://www.facebook.com/stonewall4reolution)

## Professional Groups

### Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce

P.O. Box 32446  
Detroit, MI 48232  
[detroitlgbtchamber.com](http://detroitlgbtchamber.com)  
1-800-DET-LGBT

### Ties Like Me

Professional networking events  
third Weds. 5:30 - 8 p.m.  
[TiesLikeMe.org](http://TiesLikeMe.org)  
Suits And The City  
Lansing, MI  
[suitsandthecity@gmail.com](mailto:suitsandthecity@gmail.com)  
[www.suitsandthecity.org](http://www.suitsandthecity.org)

## Transgender

### FtM Detroit

<https://www.facebook.com/FtMDetroit/>  
[ftmdetroit@gmail.com](mailto:ftmdetroit@gmail.com)

## Get Listed, Promote Your Events

You can add or update any listing by going to [www.PrideSource.com](http://www.PrideSource.com) and clicking on Yellow Pages. Once you submit your listing, our staff will contact you to confirm your information. You can add your event to the Pride Source Calendar online and in print by going to [www.PrideSource.com](http://www.PrideSource.com) and clicking on Calendar, then "Add Event." Send any press releases and announcements to [editor@pridesource.com](mailto:editor@pridesource.com)



## Find a digital version of PrideSource Magazine online under Our LGBT Yellow Pages

### FtM A2 Ypsi

[ftmannarborypsilanti@gmail.com](mailto:ftmannarborypsilanti@gmail.com)  
<https://www.facebook.com/ftma2ypsi/>

### Transgender Michigan

23211 Woodward Ave.  
Ferndale, MI  
[info@transgendermichigan.org](mailto:info@transgendermichigan.org)  
[www.transgendermichigan.org](http://www.transgendermichigan.org)  
800-842-2954

### Trans Sistas of Color Project

19641 W. 7 Mile Rd. in Detroit  
313-537-7000 Ext 107  
[info@tscopdetroit.org](mailto:info@tscopdetroit.org)  
[www.facebook.com/TSCOPD/](https://www.facebook.com/TSCOPD/)

## Youth

### Ruth Ellis Center

77 Victor Street, Highland Park, MI 48203  
[info@ruthelliscenter.org](mailto:info@ruthelliscenter.org)  
Facebook: Ruth Ellis Center  
313-252-1950

### Ozone House

102 N. Hamilton Street  
Ypsilanti, MI  
734-662-2265  
734-662-2222

### Stand With Trans

Farmington, MI  
[www.standwithtrans.org](http://www.standwithtrans.org)  
248-739-9254

## Find these resources online

- Adoption Services
- AIDS/HIV Hotlines
- AIDS/HIV Organizations
- Alzheimer's Association
- Animal Shelter
- Anti-Violence
- Archives/Collections
- Campus; Student and Alumni Groups
- Cancer Support Groups
- Choruses
- Community Centers
- Employee Resource Groups
- Families and Parents
- Foster Care
- Foundations and Funders
- Hotlines & Switchboards
- Labor Union
- Legal Organizations
- Museums
- Music Groups
- National Organizations
- Political Organizations
- Professional Organizations
- Religious & Spiritual
- Senior Living
- Seniors
- Social/Community Organizations
- Sports
- Substance Abuse
- Transgender Groups/Services
- Women's Health
- Youth Services

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Henry Ford Village is proud to announce we have been awarded the **Platinum SAGECare Certification**. This highest honor comes from SAGE, the largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of older LGBT adults. Not only does this certification name Henry Ford Village to be the only senior Life Plan Community in southeast Michigan SAGE-approved, it recognizes Henry Ford Village as one of only a small number of communities anywhere to be awarded at the Platinum level.

To learn more about our commitment to fostering diversity and inclusiveness throughout the Henry Ford Village community or to schedule a virtual tour, call 877-796-3458.



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MetroCareNetwork.org

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