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Nearly 2000 Clergy, Faith Leaders Sign Amicus Brief in Support of Transgender Protections

WASHINGTON – Today more than 1,800 clergy and religious leaders signed a friend-of-the-court brief in *Gloucester County School Board v. GG*, the first-ever case on transgender rights to go before the Supreme Court.

The brief acknowledges the diversity of faith traditions that honor the inherent dignity and worth of transgender people and the long-standing presence of transgender people in faith communities, as both lay people and religious leaders. The brief lifts up the growing movement of religious leaders who believe transgender people should be respected, celebrated, and loved rather than feared, shunned, or discriminated against under the law. In addition, it argues against narrow interpretations of religious freedom that would privilege a single set of religious beliefs about gender.

"I have learned over my years as a transgender pastor that gender is a reflection of a deeply held inner spiritual truth," said Rev. Erin Swenson, a transgender Presbyterian minister. "That inner truth is what theologians call the Image of God, and it should be bound by no human rule or law. Its expression brings joy and its diminishment pain."

More than 95 national religious leaders signed the brief including the leaders of the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Metropolitan Community Church, the Alliance of Baptists, Muslims for Progressive Values, and Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Judaism. The presidents of six seminaries and the leaders of 49 religious organizations also signed the brief.

"The book of Genesis declares that every human person is created in the image and likeness of God," said the Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church. "This divine decree proclaims the inherent sacredness, dignity, worth, and equality of every human person. The way of love for God and our neighbor that Jesus taught is the way to honor the sacredness, dignity, worth and equality of each person. For this reason, we work for the equality and dignity of transgender people, who, like the rest of us, are created in God's image and likeness."

Curry and the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, President of the House of Deputies of the Episcopal Church, are the lead amici on the brief.

"Jesus tells us to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves, and he tells us not to be afraid," said Jennings. "The Episcopal Church affirms the victory of love over fear by supporting local, state and federal laws that prevent discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression. We oppose all legal measures that seek to deny the God-given dignity, legal equality, and civil rights

of transgender people. We support transgender equality not in spite of our Christian faith, but because of it.”

The brief includes signers belonging to approximately 50 unique religious traditions, including signers who identify as Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and more. Geographically the largest percentage of signers – 30% - resides in the Northeast, followed by 27% who reside in the South. Religious leaders from all 50 states are represented on the brief.

The case before the Supreme Court is being brought by the ACLU on behalf of a Virginia transgender boy named Gavin Grimm who is challenging a policy in his local school district that singles out transgender students for discrimination and prohibits him from using the boys’ restroom at his school. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Gavin last year.

“The Gavin Grimm case speaks to the heart of humanity,” said Rabbi Denise L. Eger, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the largest and oldest rabbinical organization in North America. “As a rabbi I know Judaism affirms treating everyone as created in God's image. Gavin's simple human request for dignity at school shouldn't be a matter of debate. Transgender people are the ones most at risk in bathrooms that don't match their presenting gender—not the other way around. Let's not confuse the issue.”

In the weekend leading up to oral arguments on March 28, hundreds of clergy and congregations around the country are expected to participate in a National Weekend of Prayer for Transgender Justice, dedicating their services to supporting transgender equality and delivering sermons about the importance of the Supreme Court case. More information is available at www.nationalweekendofprayer.org/.

“All students should feel safe in school, including transgender individuals,” said Rev. David W. Key, founding pastor of Lake Oconee Community Church in Greensboro, GA. “At the heart of all faith traditions is the support for human dignity. As a Baptist minister, I urge all good people of faith to rally for this cause. Gavin Grimm deserves our unwavering support.”

The outreach on the brief submitted today was organized by a coalition of national and state-specific groups, including Religious Institute, Freedom for All Americans, and the National LGBTQ Task Force.

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