

Celebrating Our Wins Organizing For Our Future LGBTQ Immigrants in Times of Executive Action

By Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement, Transgender Law Center, and Southerners On New Ground

On Thursday night, hundreds of thousands gathered across the country in living rooms, over laptops, and in front of televisions waiting for and anticipating executive action on immigration from President Obama. Together we held our breath, we held hands, and we hoped. We hoped that the President's actions would match our organizing efforts and years of building collective power and taking risks to provide relief from detention and deportations for ourselves and for our communities.

For that, we were not disillusioned. Today, there are about 4.4 million more immigrants living in this country who can breathe a little easier at night knowing that deportation, at least temporarily, is not right around the corner. Today, the Secure Communities Program that has inflated the ability of local police to collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to detain and deport over two million people has ended. Today, we can see the direct result of our work to force politicians to see us as human beings and not disposable political pawns.

We celebrate these victories as evidence that organizing our community has worked, but we also see clearly that this announcement is just the first step in our fight. President Obama made his announcement on Transgender Day of Remembrance, which is when we remember the victims of transphobic murders, and President Obama issued a statement that "Transgender Americans often experience hatred and discrimination from those who fail to see the humanity all people share." Unfortunately, on Transgender Day of Remembrance, President Obama seems to have forgotten transgender immigrants. As we see in our work every day, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and its detention centers are the source of some of the most shocking violence that transgender people face in this country.

While transgender women only make up 1 out of 500 detained immigrants in this country, they make up a horrific 1 out of every 5 confirmed sexual assaults in immigration detention. As described in [a recent report by Fusion](#), "an ICE detention officer in Arizona forced a trans woman to take her shirt off, while he ejaculated into a styrofoam cup and demanded that she drink his semen. He admitted to the abuse and served two days in county jail, while the victim remained in ICE detention for another five months awaiting her asylum hearing — in a cell with men."

Before the announcement, Transgender Law Center recounted the sexual abuse, torture in solitary confinement, lack of access to crucially necessary medical care, and degrading and dehumanizing abuse that transgender immigrants face in immigration detention [in an op-ed where we noted that](#), "All of these abuses are in violation of ICE's own internal standards, which they have repeatedly refused to follow. These conditions so unbearable that many trans women in desperation accept deportation and risk near-

certain violence upon their return to their birth countries rather than continue to be tortured in ICE custody.”

Despite being disproportionately harmed by immigration enforcement and detention, LGBTQ people and especially transgender women of color are disproportionately excluded from the President’s relief both because we are less likely to have children or have relationships that are legally recognized and because we continue to be profiled, targeted, and criminalized for our survival. However, we encourage the LGBTQ community to see this not as a moment of loss but a moment of opportunity to hold President Obama and others accountable.

We take comfort in knowing that our organizing is what has made this moment possible and is what will make our dreams for the future possible. Together, we should celebrate this victory knowing that we will keep fighting to expand relief from deportation and make it permanent, to end the caging and torture of LGBTQ and all people, to address economic exploitation as a root cause of migration, to eliminate the idea that our community members’ convictions render them disposable such as through PEP-Comm (S-Comm’s replacement), to end mass incarceration, and to stop policies and practices that rely on a historic legacy of white supremacy and domination.

We call on LGBTQ organizations to recognize that this win is the result of dedicated grassroots organizations led by people directly affected in the Not1More Deportation Campaign, and other aligned groups, and ask the LGBTQ movement to join us in

- committing to grassroots, direct action organizing as a winning strategy
- continuing to fight immigration detention of LGBTQ people
- celebrating our people’s strength, resilience, and political will

Our belief in organizing as a strategy and our belief in our leadership should only be strengthened by this win, one of the largest in a decade. Let us take strength, lessons, and leadership forward from this win to fight for an end to the detention of LGBTQ immigrants and everything else we need for our communities to be free from violence and fear.

