



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 553

Resolution celebrating the contributions of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera to the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States.

By Council Members Hudson, Cabán, Ossé, Richardson Jordan, Schulman, Bottcher, Fariás, Restler, Marte, Hanif, Ung, Brewer and Gutiérrez

Whereas, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were pioneering transgender activists at the vanguard of the LGBTQ+ rights movement; and

Whereas, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rivera were both drag performers and vibrant characters in Greenwich Village street life who championed homeless LGBTQ+ youth and those affected by H.I.V./AIDS; and

Whereas, They were key figures in the June 1969 Stonewall Uprising who fought police as they raided the LGBTQ+ bar and safe haven on Christopher Street; and

Whereas, Ms. Johnson, who was born in 1945, was 5 years old when she began to wear dresses, but persecution from other children forced her to stop; and

Whereas, After she graduated from high school, Ms. Johnson moved to New York City with just \$15 and a bag of clothes; and

Whereas, Ms. Rivera, who was born in 1951 to a Puerto Rican father and Venezuelan mother, was only 11 when she began living in New York City on her own; and

Whereas, Together, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rivera founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in 1970, a group that provided shelter and support to poor youth who were shunned by their families; and

Whereas, Ms. Johnson was a "drag mother" of STAR House, in the longstanding tradition of "Houses"

as chosen families in the Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ community; and

Whereas, Ms. Johnson worked to provide food, clothing, emotional support, and a sense of family for young drag queens, trans women, and gender nonconformists; and

Whereas, Within the gay rights movement, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rivera were often sidelined by mainstream organizations that were led by cisgender white men, who excluded transgender people from their activism; and

Whereas, In 1973, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rivera were banned from participating in the gay pride parade by the gay and lesbian committee administering the event; and

Whereas, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rivera responded by marching defiantly ahead of the parade; and

Whereas, In 1992, Ms. Johnson's body was pulled from the Hudson River; and

Whereas, Ms. Johnson's death was ruled a suicide, but her peers questioned that determination; and

Whereas, Law enforcement later reclassified the manner of death to drowning from undetermined causes; and

Whereas, In the aftermath of Ms. Johnson's death, Ms. Rivera resurrected the work of STAR, fighting for transgender rights and the enduring legacy of transgender leaders of the LGBTQ+ movement; and

Whereas, Ms. Rivera fought for a trans-inclusive New York State Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation in employment, housing, public accommodations, education, credit, and the exercise of civil rights; and

Whereas, The bill eventually passed the New York State legislature in 2002, the same year Ms. Rivera passed away; and

Whereas, Ms. Rivera's legacy lives on through the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, which provides legal assistance to transgender and gender non-conforming people regardless of income or race, and free from

harassment and discrimination; and

Whereas, In June of 2019, New York City announced plans to build two monuments honoring both Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rivera for their lifelong commitment to creating safe spaces and ending oppression for LGBTQ+ people; and

Whereas, The efforts of Ms. Rivera and Ms. Johnson still resonate deeply as the health, safety, and autonomy of Black, Brown, and transgender people are still challenged across the country; and

Whereas, Both Ms. Rivera and Ms. Johnson were persistent and enduring voices for the rights of low-income transgender communities, whose work honored the intersectionality of sexual orientation, gender, and race; now, therefore be it

Resolved that the City Council of the City of New York celebrates the contributions of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera to the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States.

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