

[WELLNESSWORKS4US] FW: [EXTERNAL] In Honor of Transgender Awareness Week - Governor Hochul Signs LGBTQ+ Protection Bills

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GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

**IN HONOR OF TRANSGENDER AWARENESS WEEK; GOVERNOR HOCHUL SIGNS
LGBTQ+ PROTECTION BILLS**

***S.674/A.459 Relates to Vacating Convictions for Offenses Committed Due to Being a
Victim of Sex Trafficking, Labor Trafficking and Compelling Prostitution***

***S.5325/A.6193 Requires Utility Companies to Allow Customers to Use Their Preferred
Name and Pronouns***

Governor Kathy Hochul today signed legislation at the LGBT Community Center aimed at expanding protections for the LGBTQ+ community and those who have been victims of sex trafficking. The START Act relates to vacating convictions for offenses committed due to being a victim of sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and compelling prostitution. Bill S.5325/A.6193 requires utility companies to allow customers to use their preferred name and pronouns.

"As we witness attacks on LGBTQ+ rights and protections around the country, New York is once again declaring that we are a state for all - one where we don't needlessly criminalize victims and where our trans, gender non-binary, and gender non-conforming communities are affirmed," **Governor Hochul said**. "My administration is committed to equality and safety for everyone and New York is able to lead the way because of the work of our tireless advocates and our partners in the legislature. Together we will continue to build a state that is welcoming to all."

Legislation S.674/A.459, the START Act, strengthens protections for victims of sex trafficking, labor trafficking, compelling prostitution, and trafficking in persons, who are convicted of a range of offenses as a result of that trafficking or compelling. This legislation builds on a law passed in 2010 in New York allowing victims of human trafficking to vacate prostitution-related criminal convictions that were directly tied to their victimization.

Senator Jessica Ramos said, "During National Transgender Awareness week, the notion of building visibility around the structural challenges experienced by trans and gender-nonconforming New Yorkers has to be more than a gesture. We have to legislate in a way that honors and protects their rights as members of our community. The START Act gives survivors of trafficking the fresh start they deserve—lessening the barriers to employment, improving access to appropriate immigration legal remedies, and helping break cycles of trauma for thousands of survivors across our state."

Assemblymember Richard Gottfried said, "'Trafficking survivors are not criminals. People enslaved by traffickers should not suffer the burden of convictions for crimes they were forced to commit. New York's 2010 law was the first in the country and became a national model. Now, thanks to Governor Hochul, more trafficking survivors can build productive lives, and be protected from being deported for their earlier convictions. Thank you to Senate sponsor Jessica Ramos, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, and the many advocates for helping to get this important human rights bill signed into law."

Legislation S.5325/A.6193 gives utility customers the right to be addressed and acknowledged by their preferred name and pronouns by requiring utility corporations, municipalities, water-works corporations, and telephone service providers to allow customers to use their preferred name and pronouns.

Senator Brad Hoylman said, "What a wonderful way for Governor Hochul to recognize the importance of Transgender Awareness Week by signing our legislation (S.5325/A.6193) requiring utility and telephone companies in New York to use the preferred names and pronouns of their customers. Nobody should suffer the indignity of being 'deadnamed' or being referred to by their non-affirmed name or gender. And with 2021 being the most deadly year for transgender and nonbinary people since the Human Rights Campaign began recording this data, our new law sends an important message of support to the 78,000+ transgender and gender non-conforming people across New York State. I applaud Governor Hochul, along with Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assemblymember González-Rojas and my colleagues in both houses for their support of this legislation and respect for the rights and dignity of transgender New Yorkers."

Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas said, "At a time when we are witnessing a record number of murders of trans people, particularly trans women, and of anti-LGBT pieces of legislation being introduced and passed in other states across the nation, New York must take leadership and stand against hate. I'm proud to have sponsored legislation, which will ensure that transgender people are respected by utility corporations as they do business in our state. I want to thank Speaker Heastie for his support of this bill, the advocates for helping to advance it in Albany, and Governor Hochul for signing it into law. This trans awareness week let us move from awareness to action. To our trans siblings, please know that you have an ally in me because you matter. Trans lives matter."

Representative Jerrold Nadler said, "I applaud Governor Hochul for signing these common-sense protections into law. These bills make important progress toward a fairer and more equitable New York, requiring utilities to appropriately address our transgender and gender non-conforming community members and helping to break the cycle of trauma and abuse for victims of human trafficking by making it easier to clear convictions connected to their trafficking."

Representative Ritchie Torres said, "The enactment of this legislative package further solidifies New York State as a national leader in ensuring the LGBTQ community is protected, and treated with dignity and respect. As our country continues to witness a rise in hate-crimes, particularly against trans-identified individuals, all levels of government should pass laws that prevent violence and protect vulnerable communities. I applaud Governor Hochul for taking

action to enshrine LGBTQ protections into state law and further cementing New York as safe-haven for all."

Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick said, "By signing these critical bills into law, Governor Hochul reaffirms New York's dedication to dignity, respect, and the right to a second chance in life. I thank her and my colleagues for standing up for transgender and gender nonconforming identities, and for ensuring a future for all survivors of human trafficking."

Assemblymember Danny O'Donnell said, "Every day, trans people fight to have their existence recognized -- by their government, by their families, and by their peers. I am proud that our State is again stepping up and making clear: Trans New Yorkers deserve to be seen for who they are. From the Gender Recognition Act to the repeal of the Walking While Trans ban to today's bills, New York is leading the way, and ensuring that trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people get the rights and dignity they deserve. I am grateful for Governor Hochul's steadfast support for LGBTQ rights, and for furthering our State's values by signing legislation that protects trans people from further hate and harassment. All of these developments, which come during Transgender Awareness Week, re-affirm New York's commitment to upholding human rights."

Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer said, "As Borough President of the birthplace of the modern LGBTQ rights movement, I know that today's bill signings by Governor Hochul brings our state closer to a fairer and more equal place where each and every one of us can live in dignity. Thank you to Governor Hochul for ensuring that utilities will be required to allow customers to use their preferred name and pronouns, and to protecting the confidentiality of records of legal proceedings concerning victims of labor and sexual trafficking."

Council Member-elect Lynn Schulman said, "I am honored to stand with Governor Hochul today to help bring dignity to our trans community. This new provision of the Public Service Law will require utility companies to treat New Yorkers, and especially our transgendered neighbors, with the respect they deserve. Now, customers can use their preferred names and pronouns when obtaining everyday services. New York is a better place when we protect and consider everyone. In addition, the Start Act will protect survivors of human trafficking and I applaud Governor Hochul's leadership in making this bill a law. This law will strengthen our public safety by not punishing those exploited by trafficking. It will also shield survivor's confidential information from undermining their ability to rebuild their lives."

Council Member-elect Chi Ossé said, "I am excited to support legislation that acknowledges the importance of gender equity & access; and, a law that defends the lives and possibilities for victims of sexual trafficking. I will always be in full support of of legislation that moves us closer to building a just and compassionate society for our most marginalized communities."

Council Member-elect Tiffany Cabán said, "Decriminalization is an LGBT issue that moves us towards humanizing all survivors of oppressive systems. As an incoming queer Councilmember of color, it's an honor to stand with advocates today as we move closer towards that purpose. Whether it's survivors of labor and sex trafficking or trans people who are harmed by our institutions we must continue to advance legislation that brings dignity to people's existence. This is even more significant during trans awareness week as we stand in solidarity with trans, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people who are experiencing record numbers of violence. So I thank the Governor for signing these bills today and I look forward to working with her, my colleagues in the Council, the state legislature, and advocates to do that and more."

The Honorable Judy Harris Kluger, Executive Director of Sanctuary for Families, said, "Today, we join our coalition partners and survivors across New York State in celebrating

Governor Hochul's signing of the START Act. For far too long, survivors of human trafficking have struggled to rebuild their lives due to lingering criminal records for crimes committed as a result of their exploitation. Vacating all of these convictions is a critical step to ensuring survivors' long-term safety and ability to rebuild their lives. Sanctuary for Families applauds Governor Hochul and the Act's sponsors, Senator Ramos and Assembly Member Gottfried, for their leadership. We are deeply grateful to the New York State Legislature for supporting survivors in their journey to autonomy and freedom from abuse."

Co-Chair, National Trans Bar Association Kristen Browde said, "As she signs these bills today Governor Hochul continues to lead New York in protecting and respecting all of its citizens, guaranteeing that our State will do everything it can to promote and encourage equality in every aspect of life, never blaming victims who are forced into the most difficult of circumstances through no fault of their own.. As a transgender New Yorker I'm both proud and grateful for the Governor's strong advocacy, and look forward to working with her to continue that work."

Executive Director of the New York Civil Liberties Union Donna Lieberman said, "Survivors of sex and labor trafficking must be supported, not criminalized. Yet for the past decade, our state law has left some survivors enmeshed in our criminal legal system for offenses they were compelled to commit by their traffickers. That is neither dignity nor justice. With START Act signed into law, our state can now allow survivors to dismantle barriers to employment, housing, and education that remain for a lifetime, and protect noncitizen survivors, for whom a criminal conviction can have devastating immigration consequences, including deportation and family separation. Now, New York can prioritize stability over stigma."

Associate Director of the Government Affairs for Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center Andy Bowen said, "With Governor Hochul's signature on the START Act, The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center sends its deepest thanks to the Governor, along with sponsors Senator Jessica Ramos and Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, for giving so many of our clients past and present greater hope for the future. We honor the survivors and steadfast supporters who pushed for so many years to expand the protections brought about by the START Act. Now we can begin the work of vacating many more criminal records for human trafficking survivors across New York who were forced or coerced to engage in criminalized conduct beyond just sex work related charges, which were the only convictions eligible for vacatur prior to passage of the START Act. With START's enactment, we will see many kinds of healing."

Attorney-In-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society Tina Luongo said, "The Exploitation Intervention Project of The Legal Aid Society eagerly awaits the Act's implementation, as we have numerous clients who have been waiting decades for this critical relief. We stand with them in celebrating this bill and thank them for their determination and courage in speaking out about its importance. On behalf of our clients, we thank Governor Hochul for signing the START Act into law today."

Senior Trial Attorney in the Women's Defense Project at Brooklyn Defender Services Jillian Modzeleski said, "Brooklyn Defender Services is grateful to Governor Hochul for signing the START Act into law today. With this legislation, New York has taken a critical step in undoing the harm of criminalizing survivors of human trafficking. As public defenders, we are acutely aware of how damaging the financial, educational, housing, and immigration consequences of a criminal record are, and we are proud to stand beside survivors in this campaign. The enactment of this critical legislation would not be possible without the leadership of survivors of trafficking who have fought for decades to clear their criminal records and create pathways for others to do the same. We thank Senator Jessica Ramos and Assembly Member

Richard Gottfreid for being steadfast champions of the Survivors of Trafficking Attaining Relief Together Act."

Executive Director of the NEW Pride Agenda Elisa Crespo said, "Today New York sends a strong message to utility corporations, municipalities, water works corporations and telephone companies, that they must address their customers accordingly, full stop. The Affirming Gender-Identities in Utilities Act will ensure that consumers and customers' preferred name and pronouns are respected. A small but powerful gesture that goes a long way in the lives of TGNC people."

Founder of Trans Equity Consulting and recurring guest star on "Pose" Cecilia Gentili said, "Signing the START Act bill will change the lives of so many folks who have convictions for being arrested under trafficking circumstances. This will allow them to move on with their lives and build the future they dream of for themselves. As a survivor of trafficking, I applaud Governor Hochul's support."

Founder and CEO, Translatinx Network Cristina Herrera said, "As always - New York continues to be a beacon of hope and safety for the members of the transgender community. I commend Governor Kathy Hochul for her ongoing commitment to protect the rights of all New Yorkers."

Executive Director of Princess Janae Place Jevon Martin said, "Thank you Governor Hochul for seeing survivors of human trafficking and helping them regain control of their lives. Using a person's correct pronouns is essential to affirming their identity. Respecting a person's identity is showing them that you see them as they are."

Executive Director of Callen-Lorde Community Health Center Wendy Stark said, "Holistic health and well-being relies as much upon full access to competent and quality health care as it does on a government and society that values, supports and protects people. Callen-Lorde applauds Governor Hochul for signing these essential bills - the START ACT, which expands and improves criminal record relief for survivors of human trafficking as well as legislation that requires utility corporations to use a customer's self-identified name and pronoun - into law. Each in their own way will advance visibility and affirmation of our communities in every aspect of life."

Melissa Broudo, an attorney from the SOAR Institute who filed and won the state's (and nation's) first ever vacatur of convictions law said, "We are so grateful to Governor Hochul for signing the START Act into law, which will give survivors of human trafficking the opportunity to clear their records of convictions that resulted from their exploitation. As someone who has represented survivors under the current law, it is clear that we needed a more complete remedy that would allow survivors to fully move forward with their lives. This will also restore NY state as a leader in advocacy for survivors of human trafficking."

Safe Horizon's Anti-Trafficking Program said, "We applaud Governor Hochul for signing the START Act into law. This bill is a tangible manifestation of the years of advocacy that survivors and advocates have invested in securing a more just legal system. Even post-trafficking, our clients have remained haunted by their lingering criminal records and cannot move forward in any meaningful way to secure immigration relief, employment, housing or other opportunities. The ability of human trafficking survivors to clear their criminal histories of crimes they were forced to commit provides a life-changing opportunity to reclaim their dignity and agency, and move forward with new hope and resilience. We thank Assemblymember Richard Gottfried and Senator Jessica Ramos for their thoughtful leadership and unwavering support of this critical legislation."

Ricardo C., a survivor of human trafficking and advocate for the START Act, said, "I would like to thank everyone involved in this great victory today in allowing me to achieve a true 'fresh Start' by the signing of the START Act. I thank you all for your dedication to me and all the victims of trafficking, present and forever gone. The START Act gives me something the original law did not, the ability to vacate all my convictions related to my trafficking. The signing of the START Act, allows me to vacate my final conviction and gives me freedom from my captors and a fresh start for me in life, by allowing me to move on and be truly free and without bondage to a criminal record. I thank you for being the true super-heroes that have fought for our freedom and provided us the true escape from the emotional and physical trauma and reminders of those that at one time enslaved us. This day to me truly means a new beginning and a brighter future, an unimaginable future with no limitations or barriers that were once imposed on me. I am free of the worry and anxiousness, the constant reminder of what I had been exposed to, how I had been treated and forced to endure. This day forward I will no longer have that trauma present in my mind when I will apply for higher education, a new career path, new opportunities, or even places to live. I thank you all for your unwavering resolve today and I thank Governor Hochul for signing the START Act, which has truly set me free and will allow me to succeed in life."

Rosalinda, a survivor of human trafficking, said, "I am a transgender immigrant woman and survivor of trafficking. Today, I am proud to be a citizen of the United States of America, and to be living a fulfilling life as an IT professional in the healthcare field. The day I took my citizenship oath was one of the most uplifting days of my life. Things weren't always easy, however. I'm also a survivor of trafficking. Starting from the time I was a minor, a violent man sex trafficked me, and as a result I ended up with criminal convictions that were because of his crimes against me. Because of New York's vacatur law allowing people to vacate prostitution convictions, I was able to tell my story to law enforcement and get my record clean—except for one single conviction I still have today that remains. My lawyers told me that while I could have my other convictions vacated as a victim of trafficking under New York State law, because I had taken a different plea after one of my arrests to get out of jail as swiftly as possible, I was not eligible to have that conviction vacated. That meant that during my citizenship interview, I had to explain to the officer why I had this criminal conviction, re-living the humiliation and the trauma all over again. Even today as a U.S. citizen, I still feel that that one conviction is sort of a stain on my life, and a remnant of the violence and trauma I suffered in the past. To be able to vacate that conviction under the START Act would mean restoring a measure of dignity to my life and be my next step in the healing process."

Pamela, a human trafficking survivor, said, "When I heard today that the START ACT was going to be signed into law, my body started shaking and I almost collapsed on the floor. I just couldn't believe that my life could change for the better now, after 20 years of suffering. Twenty years ago I was convicted of a drug crime for something I was forced to do while under the control of my trafficker. I thought it was going to be a one-time charge for which I completed my community service and 3 years of probation, and never missed an appointment. But I feel like I've been serving a 20 year sentence because when my T visa application was denied due to my criminal history, I felt like I was being punished all over again. I've been blocked from working legally, enrolling in school, paying taxes, and accompanying my mother when she wants to travel. I have continued to suffer for the crimes that were committed by someone else. It has been such a huge weight on me that has felt impossible to lift, and made me feel sad, depressed, and like I couldn't move forward. Now I hope that I'll be able to study and work and help give back to my LGBTQ community. I hope to be able to live a normal life with my husband and do regular things like travel or adopt an LGBTQ child. This change in the law is not only going to help me finally move forward, but will also help a lot of other people like me who were involved in things they didn't want to do."

International Institute of Buffalo's Survivor Support Program is "grateful to Governor Hochul for signing legislation that will have life-changing effects for survivors of sex and labor trafficking within New York State. Many survivors have been moved by the trafficker from county to county throughout their exploitation and forced to commit various types of crimes along the way. This law will allow equal access to justice no matter what type of exploitation a survivor has experienced or where they were exploited, thereby having more equal access to justice."

Empowerment Collaborative of Long Island (ECLI/VIBES) is "grateful to Governor Hochul for signing the START Act into law. This support is essential to not only uphold the rights of survivors to live and thrive despite their past experiences of human trafficking, but it also demonstrates that New York is again standing beside survivors of human trafficking. Thank you to all of the survivors who bravely spoke out in support of this legislation."

Glenda Testone, Executive Director of The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center said, "The Center is committed to advocating for legislation and policies in New York that support the needs of the LGBTQ community. Today Governor Hochul is helping to ensure that trans and gender nonconforming New Yorkers' identities will be respected in more aspects of their everyday lives. Additionally, by signing the START Act into law the Governor is signaling to all human trafficking survivors that they are more than the circumstances they have faced in the past, an important step towards eliminating stigma and dismantling barriers they may have faced to accessing vital services such as housing, employment, and more."

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