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Queens County Grand Jury Indicts Two on Hate Crime Charges in Brutal Beating of Transgender Woman

Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund Applauds Development in Leslie Mora's Case

NEW YORK – The Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF) applauds a Queens County grand jury's indictment of two men accused of brutally beating transgender woman Leslie Mora last June.

Mora was walking home from a nightclub on Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights around 2:30 a.m. on June 19, 2009, at the height of LGBT Pride month, when two men accosted her and brutally beat her with a belt. They stopped only when a passing motorist threatened to call the police. Mora's assailants repeatedly used anti-gay and anti-transgender slurs against her in Spanish. The attack left Mora with multiple injuries, including bruises all over her body, and stitches in her scalp. Police called to the scene found Mora nearly naked and bleeding on the sidewalk. They also recovered a belt buckle from the assailants that was covered in blood.

"The grand jury correctly determined that Leslie Mora's attackers targeted her solely because she is transgender. This indictment will pave the way for Leslie to receive a measure of justice for what happened to her," said TLDEF executive director Michael Silverman.

TLDEF has been working with Mora since the attack. TLDEF, along with New York State Senator Thomas K. Duane and the members of the New York State Assembly LGB Caucus, demanded in June the Queens County District Attorney fully investigate the attack on Mora as a hate crime because her attackers perceived her to be gay. State law currently makes it a hate crime if an individual is targeted and attacked based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, but not gender identity and expression. The grand jury concluded the assault on Mora was a hate crime because her attackers perceived her to be gay and attacked her because of that perception.

"I was attacked because of who I am," Mora said. "I want to make sure that this does not happen to other transgender people and I am relieved to know that the people who did this to me will be brought to justice."

Mora's assailants, Trinidad Tapia, 19, and Gilberto Ortiz, 32, fled the scene, but police arrested them soon after the attack. Both were charged with assault with intent to cause physical injury with a weapon, and released on their own recognizance. Neither was charged with a hate crime when first arrested.

The grand jury indicted Tapia and Ortiz on hate crime charges on Nov. 20 in connection with their attack on Mora. Each faces a minimum of three and a half years in prison. Without the enhanced penalty that accompanies a hate crime charge, each faced a discretionary sentence of as little as one day in prison.

The Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act, which has repeatedly passed the New York State Assembly but which has not passed the State Senate, would add gender identity and expression to the state's hate crimes statute.

"It is unconscionable that transgender New Yorkers are being attacked on the streets where they live while New York State law fails to explicitly protect them from that violence," Silverman added.

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Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund is committed to ending discrimination based upon gender identity and expression, and to achieving equality for transgender people through public education, test-case litigation, direct legal services, community organizing and public policy efforts.