

For Release June 10, 2016, 3:00pm, CDT

Contact: The Rev. Gwen Fry, 501-891-1203, gwen@artranscoalition.org

Rabbi Barry Block, 210-387-8785, bblock0627@gmail.com

Arkansas Clergy Pen Letter to Governor Hutchinson Supporting Transgender Arkansans

More than 70 Arkansas clergy have signed a letter to Gov. Asa Hutchinson, expressing dismay that the Governor urged Arkansas public schools to disregard the United States Attorney General's directive that individuals be permitted to use restrooms conforming to their gender identity. At the same time, the letter commends Gov. Hutchinson for his apparent behind-the-scenes role in scuttling a reported legislative initiative that would have criminalized transgender men and women who use restrooms consistent with their gender identity.

The Rev. Gwen Fry and Rabbi Barry Block delivered the letter to Gov. Hutchinson's office at the Capitol on Friday afternoon.

Fry, an Episcopal priest, emphasized that countless transgender women have been the victims of violence when they have used public restrooms. "Violence, including sexual violence, in restrooms is a serious problem. Transgender women in women's restrooms, though, are not the perpetrators, nor are transgender men in men's restrooms. Moreover, no evidence exists to support the claim that men pose as a transgender woman in order to be 'peeping toms' or worse in women's restrooms."

Block added, "I am grateful to the scores of Arkansas clergy who joined Rev. Fry and me in taking a public stand against bigotry and discrimination. Too often, folks get the impression that being religious means discriminating against our relatives, friends, coworkers and members of our congregations who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. This letter is a powerful statement that LGBT Arkansans are loved and embraced in many Arkansas houses of worship, where all people are celebrated as persons created in the image of God."

Clergy who signed the letter pledged to partner with the Governor in seeking a solution to the issue in a way that "respects the rights of all Arkansans, including those who are transgender and those who are troubled by sharing a restroom with transgender persons."

The letter, with its list of signatories, is attached.

-End of Press Release. Letter below.-

June 10, 2016

Dear Governor Hutchinson:

We write to you as Arkansas faith leaders who are deeply concerned about the safety and well-being of all Arkansans, and particularly of vulnerable Arkansas children and youth. We are grateful for the role you played during the recent special session to scuttle an amendment which would have made sex offenders of transgender Arkansans who merely wish to use the restroom that conforms to their gender identity. At the same time, we are dismayed by your statement urging Arkansas public schools to disregard Attorney General Loretta Lynch's directive that transgender youth be permitted to use bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity.

Discrimination against individuals based upon their gender identity or sexual orientation is wrong, no matter how it is characterized in religious or social terms. Refusal to allow transgender Americans to use restrooms conforming to their gender identity is discrimination based on a person's sex and is therefore both morally repugnant and forbidden by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

We reject the characterization of the controversy as being about "boys" or "men" in girls' or women's restrooms. Transgender women and girls are not boys or men; they are women and girls. We further reject the proposition that people pose as transgender persons for the purpose of voyeurism or abuse in women's restrooms. No case provides evidence to document these slanderous claims. To the contrary, ample evidence demonstrates that transgender women and girls face violence in men's restrooms.

We would be eager to be part of discussions intended to frame a solution that respects the rights of all Arkansans, including those who are transgender and those who are troubled by sharing a restroom with transgender persons.

As religious leaders, most of whom are not transgender, we affirm that we are comfortable sharing public restrooms with everyone who shares the same gender identity. We affirm that every person, including those whose gender identity doesn't conform to their chromosomes, is created exactly as God intended, in the divine image.

Faithfully,

Rev. Karen Akin
Second Presbyterian Church
Little Rock

The Rev. Dr. Kate Alexander
Christ Episcopal Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Maxine Allen
United Methodist clergy*
Little Rock

Rev. Paul Atkins
United Methodist clergy*
Little Rock

The Rev. Dr. Fred Ball, OFR
San Damiano Ecumenical Catholic Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Dr. Candace Barron
Amboy United Methodist Church*
Gardner United Methodist Church*
North Little Rock

Rev. Dr. Leslie Belden
First United Presbyterian Church*
Fayetteville

Rev. Velda S. Bell
United Methodist Church*
Bentonville

The Rt. Rev. Larry Benfield
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas*
Little Rock

Rev. Michael Blanchard
Oak Forest United Methodist Church*
Little Rock

Rabbi Barry Block
Congregation B'nai Israel*
Little Rock

The Rev. Dr. William W. Branch, Jr.
Presbytery of Arkansas*
Little Rock

Rev. Jeanie Burton

Retired United Methodist pastor*

The Rev. Larry Burton
St. Paul's Episcopal Church*
Newport

The Rev. Canon Dr. Dennis G. Campbell
St. James Episcopal Church*
Eureka Springs

The Rev. Amber Carswell
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral*
Little Rock

The Rev. Mary Craig Caruthers
Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas*
Retired

The Rev. Brooks Cato
Christ Episcopal Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Jay Clark
Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church*
Little Rock

Pastor Preston Clegg
Second Baptist Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Mary Jane Cole
United Methodist clergy*
Little Rock

The Rev. Nancy Cook
St. Luke's Episcopal Church*
Hot Springs

Rev. Stephen Copley
United Methodist clergy*
North Little Rock

The Rev. Kelly Craft, MDiv

Interim Pastor
Highland Drive Christian Church (Disciples)*
Jonesboro

The Rev. Teri Wooten Daily
St. Peter's Episcopal Church*
Conway

Rev. Dr. Denise Donnell
Senior Faith Organizer
Human Rights Campaign*
Little Rock

Rev. David H. Dyer
Westminster Presbyterian Church*
Little Rock

Pastor Randy Eddy-McCain
Open Door Community Church*
Sherwood

Angelia Frazier-Henson, LMSW, Minister
Non-denominational Christian*
Benton

Rev. David C. Freeman
First United Methodist Church*
Little Rock

The Rev. Gwen Fry
Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas priest*
Little Rock

The Rev. Lisa Smith Fry
St. Mark's Episcopal Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Howard Gordon
Minister Emeritus
First Presbyterian Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Wendell Griffen

New Millennium Baptist Church*
Little Rock

The Rev. Lowell E. Grisham
St. Paul's Episcopal Church*
Fayetteville

Chad Jones, Minister
Arkansas Christians for Equality*
Conway

The Rev. Neil Kaminski
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church*
Hot Springs Village

Rev. Clare Kelley
Presbyterian Church (USA)*
Holiday Island/Eureka Springs

Rev. Adam Kirby
United Methodist clergy*
Little Rock

Rev. Blake Lasater
Eureka Springs United Methodist Church*
Eureka Springs

Rev. Frank LeBlanc
Westover Hills Presbyterian Church*
Little Rock

Rabbi Eugene H. Levy
Retired Rabbi
Little Rock

Rev. Dr. Robert Wm Lowry
Presbyterian Church (USA)*
Little Rock

Dale Manning, minister
Universal Life Church*
Fayetteville

The Rev. Patricia Matthews
Christ Episcopal Church*
Little Rock

The Rev. Mary Janet "Bean" Murray
St. Michael's Episcopal Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Jan K. Nielsen, J.D., M.Div.
Unitarian Universalist Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Victor Nixon
Retired United Methodist Church clergy*
Little Rock

Rev. Marie Mainard O'Connell
First Presbyterian Church of Argenta*
North Little Rock

Rev. Annette Olsen
Unity of Fayetteville City*
Fayetteville

Rev. James Parrish, M.Div.
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship*
Fayetteville

The Rev. Susan Payne
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral*
Little Rock

Rev. Katie Goss Pearce
United Methodist Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Kelly Pearson
First Presbyterian Church*
Dardanelle

The Rev. Jesse Perkins
St. Mark's Episcopal Church*
Jonesboro

Rev. Dennis Ritchie
Presbyterian Church of Bella Vista*
Bella Vista

Rev. Dr. Ryan A. Rush
The United Methodist Church*
Pine Bluff

Rev. Anne Russ
First Presbyterian Church of Argenta*
North Little Rock

Rev. Robb Ryerse
Vintage Fellowship*
Fayetteville

The Rev. Danny Schieffler
St. Mark's Episcopal Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Dr. Clint Schnekloth
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church*
Fayetteville

Rev. Britt Skarda
Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church*
Little Rock

Rev. Betsy Singleton Snyder
United Methodist clergy*
Little Rock

The Rev. Dr. Harris G. Sonnenberg
Retired
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America*
Fayetteville

Rev. Rebecca Spooner
Wellspring Renewal Center*
PC(USA) clergy*
Conway

Rev. Terry Tallent, MDiv
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Little Rock

Barbara G. Taylor, Ph.D.
Senior Dharma Teacher
Morning Start Zen Center*
Fayetteville

Rev. Melanie Tubbs
United Methodist Church*
Ola

Rev. Michael Vinson
Minister at Large
Presbytery of Arkansas*
Conway

Rev. Lindy Vogado
Second Presbyterian Church*
Little Rock

The Rev. Scott Walters
Christ Episcopal Church*
Little Rock

The Rev. Canon Rick Ward-Harder, Ph.D., D.Min.
Diocese of the Delta, The Progressive Episcopal Church*
St. Michael's the Archangel Parish*
Hot Springs
St. Mychal Judge*
Texarkana

Rev. J.J. Whitney
United Methodist clergy*
Conway

Rev. Dian Williams
Unity Minister, Retired*
Compassionate Fayetteville Facilitator*
Fayetteville

Rev. Susan Carter Wiggins, MDiv, LAMFT

Presbyterian Church (USA)*

*Organizations listed for purposes of identification only.