

TRANSADVOCATE

Monica Roberts' Speech To Houston City Council

By *monica_roberts*

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Abstract

Speech To Houston City Council January 7, 2014 By Monica Roberts Happy New Year and good afternoon to you Mayor Parker, distinguished members of City Council, and my fellow Houstonians. I am Monica Roberts, a proud native Houstonian who grew up and resides in District D. I'm standing at this podium today because I'm one [...]

Article

Happy New Year and good afternoon to you Mayor Parker, distinguished members of City Council, and my fellow Houstonians.

I am Monica Roberts, a proud native Houstonian who grew up and resides in District D. I'm standing at this podium today because I'm one of the people that Mayor Parker talked about in her inauguration speech last week and was inspired by it to do so.

As a transgender resident of this city, I'm keenly aware of the fact I'm not covered in this city's current NDO and don't have the human rights coverage other Houstonians take for granted. I stand here before you today to humbly ask on behalf of myself and other trans Houstonians that when you take up the issue of crafting a comprehensive non-discrimination ordinance that adds sexual orientation and gender identity to protections most Houstonians take for granted, to not forget us.

The late Nelson Mandela once stated, "To deny any person their human rights is to challenge their very humanity."

v[pullquote]We face housing discrimination, harassment on various levels from grade school to collegiate campuses to health care and we're fed up with it.[/pullquote]Far too often many of our fellow Houstonians are all too willing and eager to do precisely that. It took a court order to stop the Houston Police Department from using the 1904 anti-crossdressing ordinance then on the books in 1975 to harass Anne Mayes and other members of the local LGBT community with it until Phyllis Frye led the nearly four year solo charge to get it repealed in August 1980.

Izza Lopez was forced to sue River Oaks Imaging in 2005 after it discovered during a background check she was transgender. River Oaks Imaging used that reason to rescinded a job offer they had extended to her

Lopez said about what happened, "My first emotion when they rescinded the job offer was shock;; I was in disbelief. I had thought that if I passed, I would be able to slip under the radar of society's judgement and disapproval. But I was wrong."

Speaking of society's judgment and disapproval, Tyjanae Moore, was minding her own business at the Houston Public Library back in November 2010 but was arrested for using the bathroom appropriate to her gender presentation. An overzealous female security guard believed gender policing was part of her duties, declared Moore to be in her not so infinite wisdom a 'man' and subsequently involved the HPD officer on site in this situation.

And these are just the highly publicized incidents we are aware of. There are probably countless others inside the 628 square miles we call home that go unreported because of the lack of human rights protections and the transpersons involved feel powerless to do anything in response to the injustice aimed at them.

Well today, I'm going to reclaim and own that power on their behalf..

While we have a proud Houston flavored trans history in terms of ICTLEP, (The International Conference of Transgender Law and Employment Policy) happening here from 1992-1997, the Josephine Tittsworth organized Texas Transgender Nondiscrimination Summit, people like the late Kathryn McGuire, Judge Frye, Vanessa Edwards Foster, Lou Weaver, Cristan Williams, Jenifer Rene Pool, Dee Dee Watters, myself and others rising to the challenge of leadership inside and outside our city limits, trans Houstonians and especially trans Houstonians of color feel more like third class citizens of it.

According to the 2011 "Injustice At Every Turn" National Transgender Non Discrimination Survey commissioned by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which is having its conference here January 29-February 2, transpeople have an unemployment rate twice the national average of 7%. It's even more appalling for transgender people of color at 3x the national average.

We face housing discrimination, harassment on various levels from grade school to collegiate campuses to health care and we're fed up with it.

This shouldn't be happening in the fourth largest city in the country, and the largest in the great state of Texas. But sadly Houston is now the largest city in the US and the state that doesn't have an NDO that protects its LGBT citizens from discrimination .

A world class city like ours protects the human rights of all its citizens. It's past time distinguished council members, to let freedom ring in Houston for the LGBT citizens who live here. You'll discover that as you expand rights to include us at the Houston family table, you'll expand them for yourselves and the Houstonians you represent.

I'll close with the words of Barbara Jordan, a great daughter of our city and paraphrase them so they are applicable to my transgender brothers and sisters.

"What transgender Houstonians want is very simple. We want a Houston that is as good as its promise."

I and my trans brothers and sisters hope and pray that when you finally have the opportunity to exercise your legislative power to write that comprehensive non discrimination ordinance, you will expeditiously do so.

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