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## **85 Virginia Clergy Join Amicus Brief in Support of Transgender Protections**

WASHINGTON – Yesterday, 85 clergy and religious leaders in Virginia signed a friend-of-the-court brief in *Gloucester County School Board v. GG*, the first-ever case on transgender rights to go before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The brief acknowledges the diversity of faith traditions that honor the inherent dignity and worth of transgender people and the long-standing presence of transgender people in faith communities, as both lay people and religious leaders. It also lifts up the growing movement of religious leaders who believe transgender people should be respected, celebrated, and loved rather than feared, shunned, or discriminated against under the law. In addition, it argues against narrow interpretations of religious freedom that would privilege a single set of religious beliefs about gender.

The case before the Supreme Court is being brought by the ACLU on behalf of a Virginia transgender boy named Gavin Grimm who is challenging a policy in his local school district that singles out transgender students for discrimination and prohibits him from using the boys' restroom at his school. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Gavin last year.

"Signing on to the Amicus brief in support of Gavin Grimm's rights is a fulfillment of God's vision that all of us are created 'b'tzelem elohim – in the image of God,'" said Rabbi Amy Schwartzman, senior rabbi of Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, VA. "In Genesis 1:27 we read that God created all of humanity in the Divine image. Every person, whether transgender, straight, lesbian or gay, is a reflection of God and therefore to honor God we must honor every human being – affording each individual equal and respectful rights in all dimensions of their lives."

The Virginia religious leaders are among the more than 1,800 religious leaders who signed the brief, hailing from all 50 states. The Virginia-based clergy belong to more than 15 unique religious traditions, including signers who identify as Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist, Jewish, and more

"My wholehearted support for transgender equality is grounded in my conviction that each person is a beloved child of God," said Rev. Steve Hyde, pastor of Ravensworth Baptist Church in Annandale, VA. "Transgender equality is not merely an issue. It affects people with faces and hearts, all of whom have the God-given birthright of equality and dignity."

More than 95 national religious leaders also signed the brief, including the leaders of the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Metropolitan Community Church, the Alliance of Baptists, Muslims for Progressive Values, and Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Judaism. The presidents of six seminaries and the leaders of 49 religious organizations also signed the brief.

"As a person of faith and a Unitarian Universalist minister, I affirm that gender diversity is a blessing," said Rev. Dr. Debra W. Haffner, minister of the Unitarian Church in Reston, VA. "I support Gavin and other transgender young people in affirming their own gender identity and their right to full protection under the law. My faith teaches me that we are all created in the divine image and all people have dignity and worth. All people – no exceptions. I'm pleased to support this faith brief."

In the weekend leading up to oral arguments on March 28, hundreds of clergy and congregations around the country are expected to participate in a National Weekend of Prayer for Transgender Justice, dedicating their services to supporting transgender equality and delivering sermons about the importance of the Supreme Court case. More information is available at [www.nationalweekendofprayer.org/](http://www.nationalweekendofprayer.org/).

"Transgender rights are human rights, and commitment to human rights is central to my faith," said Rev. David Enisgn, pastor of Clarendon Presbyterian Church in Arlington, VA. "My transgender friends are beloved children of God. Like every other child of God, Gavin Grim has the right to equal treatment and protection under the law."

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