

OUT FOR JUSTICE

From Visalia to Des Moines, #RuralPride Campaign Lifts Voices, Informs, and Connects Local LGBTQ Communities

In one of our most exciting projects, NCLR has partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the True Colors Fund on our **#RuralPride Campaign**—visiting rural communities across the country to convene summits and lift up the voices of LGBTQ people living, working, and coping with specific challenges in rural America. For the past two years, we have convened 13 dynamic gatherings in towns across the South and Midwest, listening to the stories, hopes, fears, and needs of families, individuals, and rural LGBTQ advocates.

These conversations have highlighted many common themes—economic insecurity, family law challenges that persist despite marriage equality, access to competent health care, violence, school-based harassment, religious-based bigotry and discrimination, and the urgent need for strong nondiscrimination laws.

In early June, we visited North Carolina, which has been grappling with the aftermath of HB2, the hateful law that repeals all local nondiscrimination ordinances for LGBTQ people and targets transgender people, barring them from using the same restrooms as others. We talked with North Carolina advocates and community members who are providing legal and social support to those harmed by this latest attack in an ongoing backlash against LGBTQ rights.

After North Carolina, the campaign crossed the country to California's Central Valley, with a summit in Visalia in mid-July. Among the day's topics were poverty and food insecurity in the LGBTQ community. The Visalia summit also highlighted the voices of LGBTQ immigrants and advocates who shared strategies for addressing the dire need for quality, low-cost representation and transportation to immigration court. Transgender participants shared stories about the critical shortage of competent health care providers, causing many transgender people to go without medically necessary care.

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Longtime NCLR supporters and former clients Rich and Michael Butler (shown here with their daughter) operate a family farm in northern Oregon.



USDA and NCLR staff members who have been instrumental in producing the #RuralPride summit series.

Let's Dismantle Injustice Together!

The last several months have been particularly brutal. And, as I write this, we are in the midst of the most appalling political theater I've ever witnessed. More than any other time in my memory, focusing on the life-changing and heart-opening work we do feels grounding and healing and gives all of us at NCLR a real sense of purpose.



Kate Kendell, Esq.


Backlash, retrenchment, ignorance, and vicious attacks—we are seeing and experiencing all of it. But more than at any other time, it is clear to me, and millions of others who seek justice and who wish to elevate our common humanity, that our unity can bring into being the change we so desperately need. More than any other time it is clear that we are in this together.

Dismantling patriarchy, subverting white supremacy, eroding racism, and ending homophobia and transphobia will not be easy, but imagine if we succeed even a little bit. There are policy and systems changes—from voting out lawmakers who traffic in bigotry to demanding and seeing through systemic reforms in policing, immigration, education, and our broken criminal justice system—that could help erode the systems that demean and subjugate.

Whatever your priority is, whether it's a ban on high-magazine weapons, police accountability, reproductive justice, safety for queer youth, LGBTQ equality, racial justice, or economic and education changes that break the cycle of poverty, now is the time to engage, demand, roil our leaders, and displace the haters.

We are in the midst of a major national disruption. Unmoored and unbalanced. But in this deep unease there is opportunity. Each of us at NCLR are guided by an unquenchable fire to win full justice, freedom, and belonging for every member of our diverse community—especially the most vulnerable.

As you read the most recent highlights of our work, I hope you feel comforted and proud. Comforted knowing that we are here. We've got your back. Proud because without your faith and support none of this work would happen. You are our heroes in this moment. We will get through this difficult time stronger, with a greater resolve to right every wrong and with the power to do just that.

Onward,


Kate Kendell, Esq.
NCLR Executive Director

We're Not Backing Down Until All Surviving Spouses Are Granted the Benefits They Deserve

More than a year after winning marriage equality nationwide, we are still seeing—and challenging head on—companies that refuse to provide survivor benefits to the spouses of their former employees.

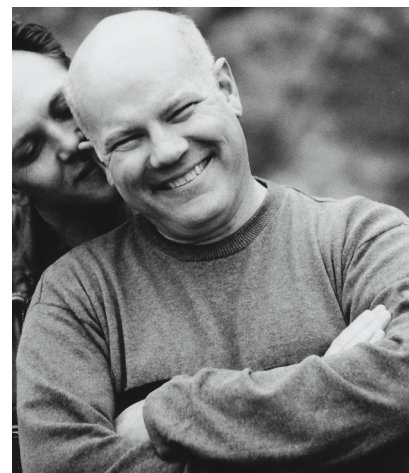
In August, we filed a case—one of several in recent years—on behalf of David Reed, who continues to be denied survivor spousal benefits following the 2014 death of his husband, a longtime employee of KRON4 in San Francisco.

David and Donald Lee Gardner began dating in 1998 and quickly fell in love. David says it was Donald's ease and wit that he was drawn to. They committed themselves to caring for and protecting one another, including by becoming domestic partners in 2004. They were together for 16 years and were married in June 2014, only five days before Donald lost his battle with a rare blood disease.

After Donald died, David sought a spousal survivor benefit under KRON4's pension plan,

which incorporates California law mandating that registered domestic partners have the same rights and responsibilities as those who are married. But, as David mourned the loss of the love of his life, the plan refused to pay the benefits Donald earned.

David's case, and so many others, show the long-lasting effects of institutionalized discrimination against our community, even after bad laws have been tossed into the dustbin of history. Until these cases disappear, NCLR will continue to fight on behalf of our community. And we will never back down.



David Reed and
Donald Lee Gardner

We're Working Harder Than Ever to End Conversion Therapy

If you did not believe it before, know it now: we are in the midst of a full-throated backlash against our lives and the lives of LGBTQ youth.

Republican National Convention delegates recently adopted one of the most vicious anti-LGBTQ platforms in history, including supporting the dangerous practice of conversion therapy that we are fighting each day to end.

Our **#BornPerfect** team, dedicated to working with state leaders across the country to pass and defend laws and policies protecting LGBTQ youth from this discredited practice, is in full swing.

As the national conversation regarding conversion therapy continues to heat up, we are working closely with local lawmakers to protect LGBTQ youth from licensed mental health professionals who attempt to change

their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In states where efforts to prohibit conversion therapy for children have stalled, municipal leaders have decided to create protections for LGBTQ youth in their jurisdictions with the help of NCLR and other LGBTQ advocacy groups.

The cities of Cincinnati, Miami Beach, Wilton Manors, FL, and Seattle have joined the growing list of jurisdictions—including California, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Illinois, Oregon, and New York—barring licensed mental health professionals from practicing conversion therapy on youth, and NCLR is working with several other municipalities to do the same.

The day is coming when every child, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity, will wake up knowing they are **#BornPerfect**. And we won't stop until we get there.

Learn more about the **#BornPerfect campaign at www.NCLRights.org/BornPerfect.**



Right-Wing Media Frenzy Prompts New Line of Merchandise Supporting #LesbianFarmers

By now you've likely seen the protests from some of the most odious anti-LGBTQ media in the nation following our **#RuralPride** summit in Des Moines, Iowa, in August.

Some, including Rush Limbaugh, even suggested that the summits, co-sponsored by the

U.S. Department of Agriculture and True Colors Fund, are part of an Obama administration conspiracy to recruit "lesbian farmers" in rural

America.

We don't care what Rush and the rest of them think, but we *DO* care about LGBTQ people who are living outside of our urban centers and we will continue to reach out and support them any way that we can.

In response to the fear and hate mongering about "lesbian farmers," we decided to launch a new line of merchandise to celebrate #LesbianFarmers and help us continue this important work.

You can get your "Recruiting #LesbianFarmers" T-shirts, mugs,

pajamas, and even baby onesies that say "#LesbianFarmer in Training" (don't worry, you can get a "#LesbianFarmer in Training" T-shirt in adult sizes, too).

With your support, we can continue to fight back and show up for LGBTQ people wherever they live.

What better way to show your support and champion this groundbreaking work than by wearing a #LesbianFarmers shirt? Check out the full line of merchandise—there's literally something for everyone—at www.NCLRrights.org/Lesbian-Farmers.



#RuralPride Campaign

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In August, we took our #RuralPride summit series to Des Moines, Iowa, where we had the privilege to hear directly from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. His keynote focused on the USDA's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and the impact of its programs that enrich the lives of millions of people across the country, including economic development, housing, and nutrition programs.

Across rural America, LGBTQ people and their families are living, working, going to school, making their homes, and raising kids. These individuals are essential parts of their communities, and they deserve services, visibility, and respect. NCLR is proud of our partnership with USDA and the True Colors Fund that is bringing together advocates,

government officials, and community members across the country to engage in conversation, connect, and together create solutions that will allow LGBTQ people in rural America to thrive.



Participants of the #RuralPride Summit in Lexington, VA, earlier this year discuss some of the unique issues they face.

Learn more about #RuralPride at www.NCLRrights.org/RuralPride

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THE NATIONAL CENTER
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NCLR is a national legal organization committed to advancing the human and civil rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community through litigation, public policy advocacy, and public education.

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