

POLITICS

# ACLU Short Film Series Highlights the Resilience of the Trans Community

These stories show the painful and relentless fight of the trans community to be seen and understood in our full humanity.

BY CHASE STRANGIO

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***them.***



Courtesy of the ACLU

***them.***



WATCH

**Kai Shappley: A Trans Girl Growing Up In Texas**

Though TIME Magazine announced the "Transgender Tipping Point" in 2014, the ensuing four years have made clear that there is much work to be done in the struggle for trans justice. Visibility is critical in the fight for our survival, and it was and still is transformative

to see Laverne Cox on the cover of a major publication. But trans and nonbinary people are still facing record rates of interpersonal violence and discrimination, as well as continued attacks from federal, state, and local governments. When it comes to day-to-day life, so many trans people are confronted with indignities and discrimination everywhere they turn.

The ACLU has curated a series of three short films highlighting the discrimination that trans people face at school, at work, and within the criminal legal system. What emerges from these three stories is the painful and relentless fight of the trans community to be seen; not *seen* in the sense of literally viewed on screen, but embraced and understood in our full humanity.

One of the short films in the ACLU series follows Kai Shappley, a six-year-old girl in Texas who is transgender. In the film, as Kai calmly colors in her home, we hear anti-trans Texas lawmakers via voiceover: “We don’t want men in women’s ladies’ rooms. This has nothing to do with equal rights.”

Opponents of trans equality use the specter of predatory men invading women’s spaces to galvanize fear of trans existence. The very premise of anti-trans rhetoric, though, is that we are not real and that we don’t deserve equal rights – or any rights for that matter. Those who would deny us our rights and dignity go to great lengths to enforce the idea that our gender is determined at birth by chromosomes or genitals, and that any internal truth about our gender that we dare to claim, embrace, or embody is always a fraud perpetrated on the world. That is not so.

## **them.**

chance.

Kai’s mom Kimberley reflects on her own journey to embrace her daughter and what it could have meant if she hadn’t: “I don’t think any one thing could have broken me. If Kai wasn’t such a strong-willed little kid, I would have broken her. Me being broken put me together better, but if I had succeeded in breaking my daughter, the statistics say that it wouldn’t have turned out well for her.”

And she’s right.

Whether by suicide, homicide, or illness, trans and nonbinary people are dying because people refuse to see our humanity. We are aware of these realities, and so it is incumbent

upon us to spread awareness and to act. These three films are part of the action of making visible trans lives. As we learned with the defeat of an anti-trans ballot issue in Anchorage earlier this year, visibility can help us win the fight to keep protections for transgender people in the state of Massachusetts this November. When voters, lawmakers, and courts see and hear personal stories from trans and nonbinary people, we can advance trans justice.

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