

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Dallas Gay and Lesbian Alliance Secures Agreement with Dallas
County DA's Office for Trans Inclusion on Its Task Force**

**Agreement has Potential to Lead to Closer, More Cooperative Relationship Between
Prosecutors and Trans Community**

(Dallas, Texas) The Dallas Gay and Lesbian Alliance is heartened by the Dallas County District Attorney's announcement this week that District Attorney Susan Hawk and her office will commit itself to greater responsiveness to the transgender and gender-nonconforming community (trans*) by adding a trans* member to its LGBT Task Force. DGLA leadership met with the DA's office shortly after the sentence was handed down in the Janette Tovar homicide case. Responding to outrage by many in the LGBT community and particularly within the trans* community, DGLA officers met with the DA's office to discuss the case and the LGBT community's perceptions and responses. DGLA strongly recommended that the DA augment its LGBT Task Force with trans* representation to provide a conduit for prosecutors to become more educated about this highly marginalized community, as well as to provide an outlet for members of the trans* community to learn more about the workings of the DA's office and the ways in which the office can serve as a resource for trans* individuals. As part of the discussion, DGLA provided the DA's office with information and statistics on trans* lives and the high level of violence perpetrated against trans* individuals – and particularly against transwomen of color – as well as information on local services and programs serving intimate partner violence victims in Dallas County that are LGBT-welcoming and trans-inclusive.

Janette Tovar, a 43-year-old Latina transwoman at the time of her death in 2012, had been in an intimate relationship with 26-year-old Jonathan Stuart Kenney for more than a year, and the couple was known by neighbors and friends to be violent throughout their relationship. Last week Kenney was sentenced to 10 years' probation in Janette Tovar's death on deferred adjudication of a felony charge of aggravated assault, and any violation of the probation terms will result in Kenney's incarceration for 5 to 99 years.

First Assistant DA Messina Madson and lead family violence unit prosecutor Kendall Castello explained the available evidence in Janette Tovar's case, as well as the depth and complexity of the investigation and the prosecutor's series of meetings with members of the Tovar family who chose to attend.

"It seems clear that this was a tragic case of intimate partner violence – not a hate crime – and it is unfortunate and frustrating when evidence in such a case involving violence and death is not decisively sufficient to return an unequivocal conviction at trial," said DGLA president Patti Fink. "This case underscores the fact that intimate partner violence is not just a straight problem – this pernicious problem also impacts the LGBT community in comparable proportions. Far too many gay, bisexual, and trans* people face domestic violence and abuse situations every day." Fink added, "It is difficult for any victim of ongoing abuse and violence to leave their relationship with the violent partner, but it is vitally important to recognize that marginalized communities don't always have access to the resources needed to get out of a dangerous situation."

DGLA Vice President David Wilkins added, "I think the DA's office realizes that this is both a teachable moment and a learning moment. It is a teachable moment because we have an opportunity to raise awareness of the problem of intimate partner violence within the LGBT community. It is a learning moment for the DA's Office because the reaction to this case has alerted them to the need to communicate more closely with, and to educate themselves more thoroughly about, an often stigmatized and underrepresented group of Dallas County citizens who are disproportionately affected by violence and brutality."

At least twenty (20) trans* individuals have died thus far in 2015, and the majority of those killed have been transwomen of color – including Shade Schuler, a 22-year-old black transwoman whose body was found in a vacant field in Dallas last month. That 2015 number already exceeds 2014's total, and violence against trans* individuals is at an all-time high.