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**STATEMENT BY ROSS LEVI OF THE
EMPIRE STATE PRIDE AGENDA ON THE INTRODUCTION OF
ALBANY'S GENDER NON-DISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE**

June 2, 2003 – Albany, NY

Thank you. My name is Ross Levi, I reside at 410 Madison Avenue in Albany and I am also Legislative Counsel for the Empire State Pride Agenda, New York's statewide lesbian and gay civil rights and political advocacy organization. On behalf of the over 25,000 Pride Agenda members statewide, and especially our members here in the Capital District, I am pleased to speak in favor of the ordinance to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and expression within the City of Albany.

The Pride Agenda firmly believes that New York must be a state where people can hold a job, buy or rent a home, get a loan, receive an education and take advantage of public accommodations without fear of being discriminated against because they do not appear to be sufficiently male or female. While current state law may provide some protection from transgender discrimination, the Pride Agenda wholeheartedly feels that statutes throughout the state should explicitly spell out that no New Yorker will be held back because of the way he or she expresses gender or sex.

Albany would not be alone in making this statement of fairness and equality. The Pride Agenda was pleased to take a leading role in working alongside the transgender community last year to pass New York City's gender non-discrimination ordinance. We have seen other New York localities including the City of Buffalo, the City of Rochester and Suffolk County, as well as other states including Rhode Island and most recently New Mexico, enact laws prohibiting transgender discrimination.

Public opinion appears to be on the side of these kinds of measure. The Albany Times-Union, in fact, just last December in an editorial following passage of the state's Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act called on government to go the next step and add protection from transgender discrimination to civil rights statutes.

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The Pride Agenda looks forward to working with the advocates and activists in Albany's transgender community, our allies in the greater community and our public officials, especially bill sponsor Councilman Richard Conti, as we move Albany onto the list of places where people can live free of discrimination based on their gender identity or expression. We of course remain available to the members of the City Council and your staffs to provide any information you may require. Thank you.