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Introduction of the Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista Panic Defense Prohibition Act of 2019

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The [National LGBT Bar Association](#), the nation’s largest organization of LGBTQ+ legal professionals, is proud to announce its support of D.C. Councilmember David Grosso’s Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista Panic Defense Prohibition Act of 2019.

These defenses have a long, murderous history. Defendants have wielded them against innocent people, including in the heinous murders of D.C residents Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista. Much to our outrage, dozens of murderers—both in the District and around the country—have had their sentences unjustly reduced by way of the LGBTQ+ panic defense strategy.

With the use of this Act, LGBTQ+ panic defenses would finally end within the District. LGBTQ+ panic defenses are legal defenses that use a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity/expression as a legal rationale for a violent assault.

If passed, this Act would finally protect LGBTQ+ people against the use of panic defenses as an excuse for violence, including murder, based on a victim’s gender identity/expression or sexual orientation in criminal cases. The Act would also provide criminal trials with anti-bias jury instructions.

As one of the nation’s leading experts on this issue, the LGBT Bar is proud to see this resolution introduced in the nation’s capital. We have worked to ban such defenses for over a decade and we were instrumental in the passage of the 2013 American Bar Association resolution calling for an end to this defense strategy in court. Similar legislation has passed in eight states to date, with numerous other states in the last year introducing legislation to curtail the defense strategy and protect LGBTQ+ victims of violence from discrimination in the courtroom. To track the status and progress of such legislation, the LGBT Bar created an [interactive map](#).

“LGBTQ+ panic defenses have long stood as a symbol of dangerous and outdated thinking,” said D’Arcy Kemnitz, Executive Director of the National LGBT Bar Association, “The Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista Panic Defense Prohibition Act of 2019 would send a clear message: Discrimination has no validity in the courtroom.”

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The National LGBT Bar Association is a national association of lawyers, judges and other legal professionals, law students, activists and affiliated lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender legal organizations. The LGBT Bar promotes justice in and through the legal profession for the LGBT community in all its diversity.