



PRESS RELEASE

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LGBTQ Youth of Color Speak Out about Homelessness and Violence at Public Hearing Held by Mayoral Commission

FIERCE calls on the City to increase resources for youth services and programs, including the development of a 24-hour LGBTQ youth center in the West Village

(New York, NY) Today, dozens of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth of color testified at the first public hearing for the New York City Commission for LGBTQ Homeless and Runaway Youth. Drawing attention to the urgent needs facing LGBTQ youth across the City, FIERCE Members—LGBTQ youth of color between the ages of 13-24—shared their experiences with homelessness and its effects, and talked about why they are engaged in a campaign to open a 24-hour LGBTQ youth center in the West Village.

“FIERCE Members and other LGBTQ youth are here today to make sure that our voices and our needs are heard by New York City and all the members of this Commission,” stated Beau, FIERCE Member. “If there’s anyone who knows the issues we’re going through and how best to address them, it’s us. We’re the ones being forced into unsafe places where we face violence and poverty, and we’re also the ones leading the fight to create safe spaces for ourselves and our communities.”

According to the latest data from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, nearly 40% of NYC’s homeless youth population identify as LGBTQ. Since its inception in 2000, FIERCE has been working to establish and maintain safe spaces for LGBTQ youth of color in New York City who are disproportionately impacted by homelessness and subjected to higher rates of violence. FIERCE’s most recent campaign, the *Our S.P.O.T. (Safe Place to Organize Together) Campaign*, includes a plan for a 24-hour Youth Center on Pier 40 in the West Village. This past August, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn committed to including LGBTQ youth-specific facilities in the redevelopment of Pier 40, and FIERCE’s campaign has received significant support from other NYC organizations.

“Every year, we bring in new youth members who have been kicked out of their homes and struggle daily to make sure their basic needs are met, whether it be safe housing or a safe place where they can be themselves,” stated John Blasco, FIERCE Organizer. “Our campaign for a 24-hour LGBTQ Youth Center in the West Village would establish a permanent safe place for LGBTQ youth who already call the Piers their home. Many youth have testified that the piers ‘saved their lives,’ and it’s time for the Mayor and Speaker Quinn to uphold and prioritize their commitments to our community.”

Some of the needs highlighted by FIERCE members’ testimony at the public hearing included:

- Access to safe public spaces to be themselves
- Safe housing
- Health and social services that are provided in a safe and LGBTQ friendly-environment
- Healthy and affordable food options
- Educational and job readiness programs

As the only youth-led member of the NYC Commission on LGBTQ Homeless and Runaway Youth, FIERCE brings the direct experiences and voices of LGBTQ youth to the table. “The Commission is a step in the right direction, and we are excited to be a part of it,” stated Rickke Mananzala, FIERCE Executive Director. “At the same time, we urge the City to restore and expand funding for LGBTQ-youth services and programs and incorporate more ways for youth to shape programs that truly meet their needs.”

To learn more about FIERCE’s campaigns, visit <http://www.fierceny.org/index.php?s=94>.

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Founded in 2000, FIERCE is a membership-based organization building the leadership and power of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth of color in New York City. We develop politically conscious leaders who are invested in improving ourselves and our communities through youth-led campaigns, leadership development programs, and cultural expression through arts and media. FIERCE is dedicated to cultivating the next generation of social justice movement leaders.
<http://www.fierceny.org>