



For Immediate Release
June 3, 2011

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**LGBTQ YOUTH OF COLOR ORGANIZATION—FIERCE—DEMANDS
IMMEDIATE END TO THE TARGETING AND HARASSMENT OF LGBTQ
YOUTH IN THE WEST VILLAGE**

**NYPD's "Quality of Life Initiative" and efforts to "clean up" Christopher Street is
not safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth**

(New York, NY) – Over the past two weeks, LGBTQ youth members of FIERCE and other LGBTQ youth of color have been targeted and harassed by the NYPD 6th Precinct in the West Village and Chelsea as part of a newly launched NYPD "Quality of Life" Initiative. On Tuesday, May 31, two plainclothes Detectives from the 6th Precinct stationed themselves in an unmarked car outside of 147 West 24th Street, the location of FIERCE, the Audre Lorde Project, Queers for Economic Justice, and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project—four community-based organizations working with LGBTQ communities of color, homeless and low-income community members and youth of color. The Detectives proceeded to stop and question FIERCE youth members. They did not have a warrant, but informed FIERCE staff that they had been ordered to question youth entering and exiting the building.

"Our communities often have experiences with the police that end with violence, harassment and discrimination. Knowing this and knowing that the police were profiling LGBTQ youth of color, it was extremely important that we protected the safety of youth members in exiting the building. With the support of ALP, QEJ and SRLP, we were able to safely escort FIERCE youth to the train and to a safer destination," recapped Krystal Portalatin, FIERCE Associate Director.

FIERCE, a membership-based organization whose mission is to build the leadership and power of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth of color, has been joined by the Audre Lorde Project, Queers for Economic Justice, Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and Streetwise and Safe in calling for an immediate end to the "Quality of Life" Initiative by the NYPD.

The NYPD initiative, which is being implemented through excessive measures such as increased police sweeps, stop-and-frisk practices, checkpoints, subway monitoring, and street floodlights and security towers, is targeting and intimidating LGBTQ youth, particularly youth of color, trans women of color and homeless youth in the area.

"I, and many other LGBTQ youth of color, call the West Village and FIERCE my home," stated Myra Aguirre, an Active FIERCE Youth Member. "Creating a safer Christopher Street must include our needs, our voices, and our leadership as LGBTQ youth of color and as a vital stakeholder group in the West Village Community. 'Cleaning up' Christopher Street cannot come at the expense of our safety, and we refuse to be pushed out of one of the few safe spaces we still have."

"What happened at our building on Tuesday and what's happening in the West Village is police harassment and part of a citywide trend of increased police violence that is largely impacting low-income and homeless queer people, especially people of color, youth, and immigrant communities," added Amber Hollibaugh, Interim Director, Queers for Economic Justice. "We will not tolerate the NYPD sitting outside of our building, or the building of any other organization working with our communities, to intimidate and question community members who are trying to access safety, receive life-saving support, and organize together."

In addition to the NYPD Quality of Life Initiative, some resident and business groups in the West Village and Chelsea have been petitioning for even more policing and organizing protest against crucial services for low-income and homeless people. Last Month, neighborhood residents in Chelsea organized a protest to stop the building of a homeless shelter on 25th Street, and similar anti-shelter protest have been launched in Brooklyn.

“We’ve seen a wave of residents and community groups who are perpetuating negative stereotypes of queer youth, homeless people, and people of color. These stereotypes feed a culture of intolerance and violence toward our communities who have been most impacted by city, state and federal budget cuts to services that we rely on,” stated Jay Toole, Director of QJ’s Shelter Project.

Since 2005, FIERCE has been engaged in the *Safe Space Saves Lives Campaign* to keep the West Village a safe space for LGBTQ youth, ensure that LGBTQ youth needs are prioritized, and to counter the displacement and criminalization of LGBTQ youth of color and homeless youth. FIERCE has a history of successfully working with community residents and groups to ensure that the West Village remains a safe place that benefits all of the communities who live, work and access the area.

In March 2008, FIERCE stood side-by-side with residents, families, and business owners to successfully defeat Related’s proposal for a privately developed mega-entertainment complex dubbed “Vegas on the Hudson.” FIERCE is part of the Hudson River Park Trust Advisory Council. In 2009, FIERCE secured the first-ever free programming on the pier for LGBTQ youth. This year, FIERCE has secured six free events on Piers 45 and 46, including a queer movie series that kicks off on June 16.

“Given the current climate of hostility and policing toward LGBTQ youth of color in the Village during a time of year when our communities spend more time in the Village, it is critical that we work together to promote dialogue and find ways to build safety and address violence that does not rely on excessive policing or the targeting of LGBTQ youth of color and homeless youth,” stated John Blasco, FIERCE Lead Organizer.

“FIERCE is proactively reaching out to our allies, supporters, elected officials, and West Village community groups and residents to address these issues because we know their impacts are devastating to LGBTQ youth and other community members. We must build a West Village that values and practices a culture of safety that considers all people’s safety, not the safety for some at the expense of others,” added Blasco.

In addition to hosting free programming on the Pier this summer, FIERCE is working with allies to take measures to hold the police accountable, reduce police harassment, and increase outreach to LGBTQ youth about the *Safe Space Saves Lives Campaign* and *Our SPOT (Safe Place to Organize Together) Campaign*, which is working to establish a 24-hour LGBTQ youth center in the West Village.

“What is happening now only magnifies the need for a 24-hour youth center,” said Myra Aguirre. “With the center, we would not only have access to a safe place, but we would also be creating an environment that supports our development as community members and leaders.”

FIERCE’s plan for the 24-hour LGBTQ youth center includes provisions for health and medical services, civic engagement programs, job training and placement services, arts/culture events and recreation.

“We are three days into Pride Month, and FIERCE is excited to be organizing events on the pier for LGBTQ youth,” stated Portalatin, who is also a founding member of FIERCE. “We will not be frightened away by the police, and in the spirit of Stonewall and FIERCE’s 11 years of organizing in the West Village, we remain committed to fighting for our community and against police brutality. We encourage all LGBTQ youth of color, as well as community members and business owners, to join us on the piers this summer so we can continue building relationships and making the West Village a better and safer place.”

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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>