

CITY OF BOSTON TRANS AND NON-BINARY TOWN HALL

City of Boston Artist-In-Residence [Golden](#) and Feminine Empowerment Movement Slam (FEMS) Founding Director Zenaida Peterson co-hosted a virtual Town Hall on October 7th from 4:00pm-6:00pm EST in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Arts & Culture to discuss the representation of transgender & nonbinary individuals in the City of Boston's policies & processes, with a focus on naming ways the City can better support transgender and nonbinary Bostonians. In addition to live testimony which can be viewed [here](#), or on our Youtube [page](#), this Town Hall collected written testimony specifically from trans, nonbinary, genderqueer, and gender-expansive individuals currently living in the Greater Boston area. Those written testimonies can be read below.

If you have any questions about the City of Boston Trans & Non-binary Town Hall, or would like to learn more about Boston Artist-in-Residence, Golden's work, feel free to contact bostonair@boston.gov.

Golden (they/them) is a black gender-nonconforming trans-femme photographer and poet raised in Hampton, VA, currently residing in Boston, MA. Golden is the recipient of a Pink Door Fellowship (2017/2019), an Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Luminaries Fellowship (2019), the Frontier Award for New Poets (2019), and a Pushcart Nomination (wildness, 2019). Their work has been featured on/at the Shade Journal, the Offing, wildness, Button Poetry, BuzzFeed, i-D, Interview Magazine, & elsewhere. Golden holds a BFA in Photography from New York University and is currently a City of Boston Artist-in-Residence. Instagram: [goldenthem_](#). Twitter: [goldenthem](#). Website: goldengoldengolden.com. Through the Boston Artists-in-Residence (AIR) program, artists work with a parallel cohort of City partners to explore, critique, and re-imagine City initiatives at the intersection of civil service, social justice, and artistic practice.

Zenaida Peterson, author of "Breakfast for Dinner and Other Blasphemous Things" published by Pizza Pi Press is a mystic, an organizer, a house plant gardener and a

Black non-binary poet from the south currently thriving in Boston, Massachusetts. They are the founding director of Feminine Empowerment Movement Slam (FEMS), an all ages radical poetry slam centering marginalized people and celebrating the feminine. Zenaida are easing the impacts of 2020 by learning to make plant medicine, engaging in restorative justice, mutual aid and farming. They are the Equity and Empowerment Director of Quaker Voluntary Service. . Their current project is spending each month of 2020 conquering a different fear of theirs.

CITY OF BOSTON TRANS & NON-BINARY TOWN HALL VIDEO

WRITTEN TESTIMONIALS

Meghan Chiampa

Pronouns: They/Them

I would like to see less funding for BPD (Boston Police Department) and more into funding for mental health access and support. The mental health care system and it is at best, the bare minimum, which is pathetic for a state who boasts the worlds greatest health care providers. I would like to see a more LGBTQ inclusive plan for mental health in Boston and Massachusetts as we often need detailed care around our mental health needs. The system here is very "take what you can get", and discriminates against race, youth, financial situation, disability and being uneducated. The system leaves members of the LGBTQ community and other marginalized communities grasping onto the bottom rung of the ladder. Our needs come last and we often face discrimination. My request includes more funding for drug addiction and treatment which also proportionally affects the LGBTQ community. Expansions and more funding for programs like and are similar to Fenway Health.

I would like to see more financial security provided by the city for arts spaces as the arts run parallel with the LGBTQ community. The amount of art spaces and venues closing is detrimental to the queer community as many of them serve as safe spaces. During the plague alone we've lost Great Scott which hosted DADT a queer

night among many other shows and The Milky Way and many other places. And this comes after years of merciless gentrification in neighborhoods known for their diversity and culture (I live in Allston, please stop the condos, please). I would like to see, bare minimum, more funding for LGBTQ orgs to secure physical space for operation within the city lines. I would like to see ultimately, funding and support for local LGBTQ orgs to become full or partial *owners* of property within city lines to secure permanent space. Art is crucial to mental health, I am not even going to argue this, I know you know.

Charline

Pronouns: She/They

Being a first generation Chinese American, food is a vital way for me to stay connected to my ma and my cultures. Being a bi-lingual Non-binary person, I found Art and Growing food as a language barrier across many identities. I have found many farms and growing spaces are led and owned by White Cis folk and often transphobic and intolerant of growth. As this nation continues to grow and celebrate more identities, there's also those who can't let go of the power and comfort they are given. This land needs to be re-honored by the indigenous folk whose ancestors nurtured before colonizers stole it and to African American families who grew this nation as we know it now. I feel that it is vital to stop white folk to continue to own land and for that land to be given to QTBIPOC stewards to achieve freedom, grow food and nurture our future generations. Only then can we begin to heal and deal with our diaspora. White cis owned land and leadership isn't ever going to create a space where we can thrive.

Anonymous:

I am sharing testimony to express my concern about discrimination on the basis of being transgender happening in health care and human service settings in the Greater Boston area. Last month I was instructed by my medical providers to get a COVID-19 tested. I provided my name, date of birth, photo ID, confirmed the test tube label the same as all other patients, and yet was sexually harassed and harassed on the basis of gender identity, being screamed at in front of all other

patients by staff that they did not have to regard me respectfully as a transgender person or gender me correctly. They then called the police stating I was "slowing down the test center" for asking politely to be gendered correctly. I did not get the COVID 19 test I needed, and a month later, still have not been able to obtain testing needed, despite calls to my doctors office, patient relations, the mayors office, the department of public health, and 211. I was told a Massachusetts Commission against Discrimination Investigation would take 2 years- far too long for COVID 19 testing access. Similar experiences have been reported by numerous friends. I would like to ask the Mayors office mandate non discrimination training that includes training to respectfully interact with transgender patients and make reasonable accommodations on the basis of disability at all testing sites in the city of Boston, and designate one or more individuals to serve the public as a rapid response to offer mediation in discrimination incurred in COVID-19 testing or care.

I am deeply concerned to have recently been denied domestic violence services by the state hotline, Safelink, by a hotline worker who was mocking me and insulting me for being Transgender and denied me services. As far as I can tell, there is no pathway to report mistreatment by a domestic violence or rape crisis agency to the city or state. Please create a pathway to investigate these serious issues.

The discrimination I experienced severely has impacted my mental health. We know from research that half of transgender individuals attempt suicide, Meaning we may have more than 15,000 transgender suicide attempt survivors in Massachusetts (With an estimated .5% of transgender adults). This summer, the CDC reported one in four 18-24 year olds also seriously considered ending their life in the past month (equivalent to 130 thousand Massachusetts residents). meanwhile, we have only 630 inpatient psychiatric beds, and providers continue to call the police as a knee jerk response to patients talking about suicide. These numbers do not add up- and we also know that transgender people report, such as in surveys done by trans lifeline, to be very unlikely to seek help if there is concern the police will be called or they will be coerced into care. Please allocate funding in the city of Boston for transgender peer specialists to be providing phone or virtual peer support to address these mental health risks at a community level with services residents will actually use- at a time when many lgbt specific resources, including translifeline, and local lgbt domestic violence resources have struggled to keep up with calls during the pandemic with increased calls, and the issues trying to access

outpatient mental health care, especially when being discriminated against are severe. Having been denied psychiatry care by a major boston hospital on the basis of being transgender, and unable to access the care I needed despite 25+ calls I had a preventable suicide attempt last month.

My life and the life of all transgender people in the Greater Boston area matters. Please consider mandating non discrimination training that includes training to respectfully interact with transgender patients and make reasonable accommodations on the basis of disability at all testing sites in the city of Boston, and designate one or more individuals to serve the public as a rapid response to offer mediation in discrimination incurred in COVID-19 testing or care, create a pathway to investigate mistreatment or discrimination in domestic and sexual violence agencies, allocate funding in the city of Boston for transgender peer specialists to be providing phone or virtual peer support to address these mental health risks at a community level with services residents will actually use. Thank you.

Anonymous:

Writing this feels impossible, because there are just so many ways that the city has failed and continues to fail trans people. It's hard to know where to begin, what's the most urgent, what's the best way to illustrate what I (and others) need in a way that will matter to (cis) people.

I am a non-binary person who is on hormones and who has had gender affirming surgery. I work as an adjunct professor at a college in Boston. After having worked there since 2015, I finally became eligible for health insurance through the college last year. I get paid very little, and so I usually have another part-time job on top of this. I was laid off from that job in April due to COVID-19. I'm currently teaching online, even though the college is (irresponsibly) holding in-person classes, because both my partner and I are at a higher risk for COVID complications. I typically teach two classes a semester, but this semester, I'm teaching one. This not only means I'm getting paid half; I also lost my health insurance as of a week ago. I have been collecting unemployment since April until recently, when I returned to teaching. I have not been able to apply for MassHealth due to an "identity verification" issue

with the unemployment office which has rendered me unable to properly calculate my income (which you need to do to apply). I have a strong suspicion that this issue is related to my being transgender (I have not legally changed my name, but I go by another name, and most people assume I'm a man from my appearance, although I am legally still "female"), but the unemployment website gives very little information, and it is totally outdated and impossible to navigate.

In May, I sustained a knee injury. It was painful, but I hoped the swelling would go away. When it didn't, I still didn't want to go to the doctor, because it's a complete nightmare to go through all of the misgendering and other microaggressions/dehumanization associated with it. My knee didn't heal, and the pain spread to other joints in my body. I felt exhausted all the time. I could barely do mundane tasks such as doing laundry without feeling like I'd run a marathon. Every day, I would wake up so stiff I couldn't move. I was constantly consumed with both horrible physical pain and the emotional pain of knowing I needed help but also knowing that I would likely be mistreated and/or dismissed by healthcare professionals. Finally I saw my PCP at my community health center, who referred me to an orthopaedist at the hospital that my health center contracts with, who was awful. He was disrespectful of my being trans, and it was obvious that he thought I was overreacting and just needed to "rest." He was exactly the kind of doctor that made me so hesitant to seek treatment to begin with. Thankfully, I advocated for myself, and, long story short, after weeks of more tests and appointments, I was finally referred to a rheumatologist, who I am currently seeing. My rheumatologist is very nice, but I did still have to have that cringey awkward talk with her about "what I am," and I'm still not sure she gets it.

It was extremely difficult to find a job as a trans person before COVID, but now that more people are unemployed, it's even worse. What job can I get that won't kill me? I have an autoimmune disorder. Two days after I started treatment, I lost my health insurance. I don't know how or if I will get the next refill of my medication, and I am terrified. I have been hoarding my leftover hormones in case something like this happened. There's a pandemic that is killing people, and I am taking medicine that suppresses my immune system, and I don't have health insurance. I have PTSD, OCD, and depression. How am I supposed to cope with all of this? I have been on the waitlist at my health center to talk to a therapist since July. There "should be" availability by the end of November. Will I have health insurance by then? But what

if this therapist is transphobic (many are)? Or what if it's not a good fit for some other reason? What if I don't make it to November?

I know that's a jumbled story, and I might sound a bit unhinged. (If only there was some sort of accessible and affordable mental health treatment available for people like me...) But I hope it illustrates just a tiny fraction of what it's like to be trans in Boston during this pandemic. I'm so sick of having to tell sad, shitty stories like this. There is so much I love about being trans (and even about Boston), but it's hard to appreciate it when most of my life is spent focusing on not dying or trying to avoid the fact that I will likely die before the pandemic is "over."

Trans people deserve affordable and excellent gender-affirming mental health and medical care. We deserve so much more than to suffer and die in Boston. We deserve joy.

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To view the live testimonies from the City of Boston Trans and Non-binary Town Hall, please [visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cA4gcqRSBWA&t=1147s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cA4gcqRSBWA&t=1147s).