

The Marsha P Johnson Institute: Prioritizing the Safety and Wellness of Black Transwomen through the Marsha P. Johnson Safety and Wellness Act

The Marsha P. Johnson (MPJ) Safety and Wellness Act provides Black Transwomen with a platform to design a national model for policies, legislation, and laws that prioritize the safety and wellness of their communities. Similar to the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA), this Act, when implemented at the federal, State, and local levels will create increased resources, programs, and other interventions, designed to center the needs of the victims of both community and State level violence that negatively impacts the lives of Black transwomen. However, unlike the VAWA, the MPJ Safety and Wellness Act will be written by directly impacted communities and will not rely on law enforcement interventions and other punitive measures that jeopardize the safety and wellness of Black transwomen, and perpetuate the cycle of mass incarceration for Black communities.

Reclaiming Marsha P. Johnson's Political Narrative: We Aren't Waiting on Anyone to Protect Black trans women

Outside of increasing the safety and wellness of Black transwomen and ending the murders within the community, an additional goal of the MPJI and its work around the safety and Wellness Act is to reclaim the narrative of Marsha P Johnson, a Black trans leader who was radical in her approach, but not in her demands. Marsha P. Johnson started the Stonewall Riots, a pivotal moment in the fight for LGBTQ equality, by throwing a brick at police at the Stonewall Inn. Recognizing the connection between police brutality and discrimination against LGBTQ people, Marsha P. Johnson didn't wait for permission to fight for the right for her and other marginalized people to exist. In that same spirit, the Marsha P. Johnson Safety and Wellness Act is a signal to the world that Black transwomen are not waiting for cisgender people to take enough interest in ending the patriarchy, racism, and transphobia that jeopardizes their lives.

The MPJ Safety and Wellness Act takes a different approach to addressing the murders and social inequities that Black transwomen experience by seeking to prevent harm, transform violence, and increase equity. Prioritizing the inclusion of these policies acknowledges the dual need for increasing access to upward economic mobility and the need to decriminalize sex work as key interventions.

This Act is grounded in a belief that we should be divesting money and resources from government institutions and programs that have proven to be ineffective and even harmful towards the communities they claim to help. The MPJ Safety and Wellness Act recognizes the humanity in marginalized people, the need for restorative justice, and a knowing that none of us are disposable.

Moving Marsha: How We Plan on Advancing the Marsha P. Johnson Act

Following our launch event, the MPJI will be working to immediately organize Black transwomen, and the organizations serving them around the MPJ Safety and Wellness Act. More specifically, we will be working in partnership with local Black and Trans organizations of color to help increase the capacity of Black transwomen to translate their lived experiences, trauma, and brilliance into a set of policy recommendations that is reflective of our transformative politics and their holistic safety and wellness needs.

The MPJI recognizes that most local Black Trans and people of color organizations are consumed with responding to the immediate and basic needs of Black transwomen. Because of this, they need support from the MPJI as there are no other LGBTQ or Trans centered national organizations focused on building political power among Black transwomen as a direct intervention to community, interpersonal, and State influenced violence.

This work will be taking place nationally, but with a focus on local DC and PG County challenges. As we are providing trainings, vision boarding sessions, and other engagement activities designed to capture the needs of Black transwomen, we will be reaching out to elected officials in our target cities including the DC area, to get preliminary commitments for support. Collaboration and deeper allyship in the creation of the MPJ Safety and Wellness Act is vital to its success.

Anticipate requests from the MPJI and its allied organizations to participate in round tables, working groups, policy briefings, strategy sessions, and other activities needed to amplify and advance the MPJ Safety and Wellness Act. As more specific and localized versions are introduced by advocates, expect direct asks from Black transwomen individually and collectively for your commitment to support any policies, legislation, or laws modeled after the MPJ Safety and Wellness Act.

This is an invitation for partnership, however, *we are not waiting on your permission* to stop the killings of Black transwomen. The MPJI is committed to building out the MPJ Safety and Wellness Act in partnership with Black transwomen across the country and that commitment remains regardless of the action or inaction of elected officials. As the MPJ Safety and Wellness Act begins to take shape we will share with the world who stood with us and who did not. Black transwomen and the world deserves to know which leaders value the preservation of life versus those who do not. We will hold you accountable.