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SEX OFFENDER RECIPIENT OF PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM

Albuquerque, NM / August 25, 2013—Bayard Rustin, who was recently named a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, will be honored at the 5th Annual National Reform Sex Offender Laws conference to be held in Los Angeles from August 30 through September 1. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the nation’s highest civilian honor.

President Barack Obama posthumously named Rustin as a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom on August 8, 2013. The medal is to be presented to Rustin and to 15 other individuals – including Oprah Winfrey and former President Bill Clinton — who have made meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.

The citation for Rustin’s award states:

Bayard Rustin was an unyielding activist for civil rights, dignity, and equality for all. An advisor to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he promoted nonviolent resistance, participated in one of the first Freedom Rides, organized the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and fought tirelessly for marginalized communities at home and abroad. As an openly gay African American, Mr. Rustin stood at the intersection of several of the fights for equal rights.

“We will honor Bayard Rustin for the courage he demonstrated as a civil rights leader, a gay African American and a sex offender,” stated Janice Bellucci, President, California Reform Sex Offender Laws. “It is appropriate that we do so in Los Angeles county where sex offender registries began and where Rustin was arrested and jailed in 1953.”

Rustin will be honored at a banquet to be held on August 30 during the national RSOL conference to be held at the LAX Westin Hotel. The focus of the conference is the reform of existing sex offender laws throughout the nation that deny the civil rights of more than 750,000 sex offenders and members of their families.

“The civil rights activism demonstrated by Bayard Rustin continues today,” stated Brenda Jones, Executive Director, National Reform Sex Offender Laws. “We are fighting against laws which punish individuals and often result in unemployment, homelessness and vigilante violence, even death.”

The RSOL conference will include individual speakers and panels of experts on topics such as residency restrictions, presence restrictions and the retroactive application of laws to individuals convicted 50 years or more ago. There are more than 100,000 registered sex offenders in the state of California, including more than 11,000 in Los Angeles County.

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“An important topic to be discussed at the conference will be a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that ruled that registration of sex offenders is not punishment, but merely an administrative requirement,” state Janice Bellucci, President of California RSOL. “Subsequent to that decision, there is overwhelming evidence to prove that registration is not an administrative requirement, but indeed punishment. Registration of sex offenders has resulted in unemployment, homelessness and even vigilante violence. This decision must be overturned.”

“Justice for All: A Conference to Reform Sexual Offense Laws”, will be held in Los Angeles during Labor Day weekend. The conference will include on Friday, August 30, a presentation by Alex Landon, a prominent criminal defense attorney. Landon is co-author of the book “A Parallel Universe” which analyzes sex offender issues from both legal and human perspectives. Landon is also former president of California Attorneys for Criminal Justice and is a current board member of the California Reform Sex Offender Laws (CA RSOL) organization.

Past national conferences have been held in Boston, Washington, D.C., St. Louis, and Albuquerque.

Additional confirmed speakers include:

- Catherine Carpenter, criminal defense attorney and professor of law at Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles;
- Doctor Suzonne Kline, former administrator of Florida’s Sexually Violent Predator Program; and
- Doctor Clare Ann Ruth-Heffelbower, Founding Program Director of Support and Accountability at the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at Fresno Pacific University.

Online registration for the conference and banquet is now available at www.rsolconference.org.

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