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EXCLUSIVE

THESE TRANS-RIGHTS ADVOCATES AREN'T WAITING FOR DEMS TO SAVE THEM

The Gender Liberation Movement occupied Capitol bathrooms last month to protest an anti-trans ban. They're just getting started

By **NIKKI MCCANN RAMIREZ**

JANUARY 9, 2025

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Pro-transgender rights activists with the Gender Liberation Movement protest in the House Cannon building and face subsequent arrests on Dec. 5, 2024 in Washington, D.C.

MAANSI SRIVASTAVA/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

President-elect Donald Trump and Republicans will soon have control of the government — and they're coming into power with a list of targets. Among the GOP's plans for mass deportations, eroding reproductive rights, and taking over Greenland is continuing its crusade against the LGBTQ community, particularly trans Americans

As Democrats struggle to find their footing in the aftermath of a decisive defeat in November's election, one group of advocates is hoping to take the lead in the fight to protect the trans community, as well as any American hoping to protect their right to bodily autonomy. On Thursday, the Gender Liberation Movement (GLM) — a collective of organizers, activists, and volunteers who have been making waves on Capitol Hill — announced their launch as a national organization. In an exclusive interview with *Rolling Stone*, Gender Liberation Movement Co-Founders Raquel Willis and Eliel Cruz spoke about the new group, and what they hope to accomplish in the Trump era.

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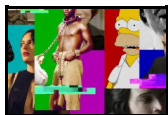
In September, GLM held a march uniting more than 2,000 reproductive rights and gender rights activists in Washington, D.C. Willis tells *Rolling Stone* that as the 2024 election cycle kicked into high gear, they saw “an opportunity to bring together the energy around the fight for reproductive freedoms and the energy around the fight for gender affirming care, because it’s all about bodily autonomy.”

According to Cruz, with the potential of a second Trump term on the horizon, “we had come to understand that we needed to become a fully fledged organization and to do this work,” and become “more intentional about the work we’re planning to do, and become a little bit more organized.”

In Willis’ view, powerful conservative groups like the Alliance Defending Freedom and the Heritage Foundation are well aware that their attacks against reproductive and gender autonomy are — at their core — a repudiation of liberal principles surrounding bodily autonomy. “Somehow the left has not collectively figured out how to articulate those connections, and so

that's what we're trying to do," she says.

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“Gender Liberation Movement is preparing for the numerous threats that are going to be heightened under the second Trump administration,” Willis adds. “We are a collective built on years of deep, intentional, intersectional work around bodily autonomy and self determination, but also just safety and security for communities on the margins [...] We often see ourselves as the glue between other efforts. and really unearthing the energy and values that have already been here, but have not been thought about in a different way around a gender liberation umbrella.”





Eliel Cruz and Raquel Willis

D.J. LEHRHAUPT

In the aftermath of the 2024 elections, Democrats remain lost in a consultant-addled fog regarding what exactly they can do to regain trust from voters and rebuild their electoral coalitions. Among the various calls to refocus the party on universal working class issues — like economic growth, housing, and health care — a reactionary impulse to reject identity and racial politics has taken root in some corners of the party. An impulse that has vulnerable communities worried about how much trust they can place in their elected leaders at a time when the incoming administration has placed a target on their backs.

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“Can we just talk about how bullshit it is for us to think that economics are completely divorced from what we’re calling ‘culture wars’ and the discrimination that people face around their experiences and their identities?” Willis says “It’s all connected ... and so if you’re not able to understand these connections, then you don’t need to be in leadership.”

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“We will continue to hold Democrats accountable because they have been dropping the ball left and right, even before the 2024 election in regards to bodily autonomy and self determination,” Willis says. “But I think it’s been particularly clear that communities on the margins are going to have to build for ourselves.”

Willis points to the recent anti-trans measures proposed in Congress by Rep. Nancy Mace (R-Ga.), who has made petty legislation targeting Rep. Sarah McBride (D-Del.) — the first openly transgender member of Congress — a lynchpin of her public persona. In December, 15 activists, including Willis and Cruz, were arrested after conducting a sit-in organized by GLM opposing a bill proposed by Mace that would bar legislators, their staff, and Capitol employees from using bathrooms and other facilities that do not correspond with their biological sex.

The bill was clearly an attempt by Mace to target a freshman member of the Democratic caucus, which did little to oppose the effort outside of vocalizing opposition. “It’s clear that Democrats see trans people as a political liability, and are willing to capitulate to these ‘cultural wars,’ thinking that it’ll help them win when it won’t,” adds Cruz. “I think that the most identity politics had pushed them to was to elevate certain trans narratives, typically of white trans people — very specific types of trans stories — without actually having a larger politic that understood how to fight for the needs of all trans people.”

“Trans people need access to housing, health care, employment, etc, all things that everyday Americans need,” he explains. “There needs to be a shift in these Democrats, their consultants, analysts, whatever, to understand that the story of the needs of the trans community is actually a lot more universal than people are sharing it as. It’s not some side issue, it’s much more encompassing of that middle America than people would like to admit.”

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The group is still in its early stages, hoping to grow its

volunteer base and national presence in the coming months. Cruz wants the organization to help push Democrats and the left to develop a “north star” policy package — something, for lack of a more contemporary comparison, akin to Project 2025

“What is our antidote to Project 2025?” he asks, noting that for all its draconian proposals, Project 2025 is a succinct, well-developed synthesis of what the conservative movement wants to achieve not only in the coming administration, but over the course of decades.

“One thing that is missing among leftist, Democrats, even centrists, you could say, is those ‘north star’ policy proposals,” he adds. “There are scatterings of them around housing and around climate change, et cetera. But what does it look like to group something together? We want to not be in a continually reactive space, and hopefully we can carve out some time to actually be proactive and think about those in those decades.”

Willis adds that in founding the Gender Liberation Movement, she wants to communicate to people that the bulk of their power “actually doesn’t rely on these representatives that get into offices.”

“We think that whatever policies that will be developed in this next era that are going to be effective, they’re going to come from the people,” she says. “They’re not going to come from politicians. They’re not going to come from the folks who have all the titles and money and the acclaim and name recognition. It’s going to

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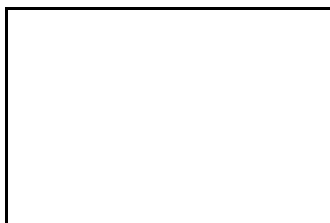
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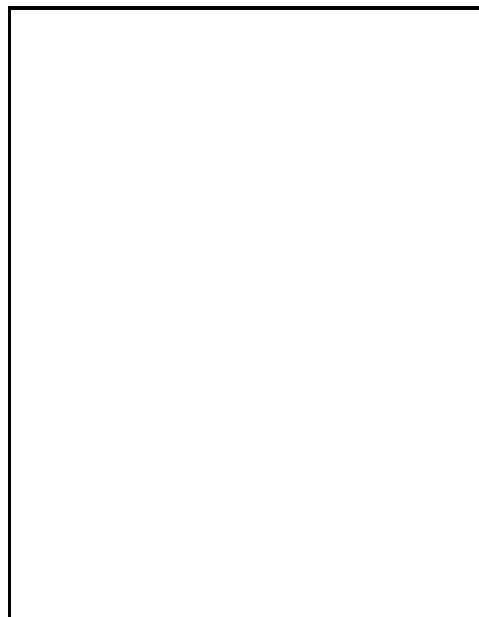


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