



**SWOP-NYC**  
**Sex Workers Outreach Project**  
**New York City**

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### **On International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, Vigil Held to Mark One Year Since Bodies Discovered on Gilgo Beach**

New York, NY - On December 17, 2011 people in the sex trade and their family and friends gathered at Trinity Lutheran Church of Manhattan to hold a vigil for the victims of the Long Island murders and the many other people killed every year because they trade sex and are vulnerable to violence.

The event commemorates the year anniversary of the discovery of the bodies of Amber Lynn Costello, Megan Waterman, Melissa Barthelemy, and Maureen Brainard-Barnes on Gilgo Beach in Long Island, New York. The murdered women were found after the family of missing woman Shannan Gilbert insisted on a police investigation of her disappearance. A year after the search began, police have found 11 bodies, including a body they believe is Shannan's. The cases remain unsolved.

"We are gathered to mourn these women, and to insist that their deaths not be forgotten. The violence they suffered is part of a continuum of mistreatment, including police brutality, criminalization, stigma and discrimination, that affect sex workers every day," said Audacia Ray, a former sex worker and organizer with Red Umbrella Project.

This year's vigil featured speeches by former sex workers and their friends, sharing their personal experiences with violence, and giving a human face to an often misunderstood experience. Cayenne Doroshow, and A. Lee spoke. Daisy McCloud reflected on finding out that a friend had been murdered. "I think that giving sex workers a face and a voice will bring us out of the darkness and all the shunning, shame, blame, and dangers that exist there," Daisy said.

As in prior years, attendees wore red, to echo the red umbrella adopted as a symbol of solidarity by sex workers in Venice, Italy. The community in attendance read the names of sex workers lost to violence, while candles were lit. "In Memoriam," a mixed-media quilt by Sarah Jenny Bleviss and Michelle Temple commemorating sex workers who have died, was displayed. "Sharing this piece is a way for me to personally work through fear, pain, and the loss of those in my community," said artist Sarah Jenny Bleviss.

The vigil ended on a hopeful note, as the community joined in a speak-out calling for an end to all forms of violence against sex workers, including incarceration, brutality, profiling, extortion, and stigma.

"The December 17th event is an opportunity to mourn those we lost this year to violence, but it's also a moment for families, friends and allies to show their support for individuals in the sex trade, and remind the world that there are people who care," Said Sarah Elspeth Patterson, a community organizer with the Sex Workers Outreach Project.



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The event was organized by two local sex workers' rights organizations. The Red Umbrella Project amplifies the voices of people who have done transactional sex, through media, storytelling, and advocacy trainings. The Sex Workers Outreach Project is a social justice network dedicated to the fundamental human rights of sex workers and their communities, focusing on ending violence and stigma through education and advocacy. Parallel events occurred this week in many American cities and as far away as Cape Town, Phom Phen, and London.

The International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers was founded in 2003 by sex worker activists Robin Few and Annie Sprinkle to commemorate sex workers murdered by serial killer Gary Ridgway. Ridgway demonstrated the attitude that cultivates violence towards sex workers, when he said, "I picked prostitutes because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught."

The event was co-sponsored by [NYC Anti-Violence Project](#), [PONY \(Prostitutes of New York\)](#), [Sex Workers Project](#) and the [Police Reform Organizing Project](#) at the Urban Justice Center, [the PROS Network](#), the [Center for Constitutional Rights](#), [HOOK](#), [Latino Commission on AIDS](#), [Queering OWS \(Occupy Wall Street\)](#), [Paradigm Shift](#), [Positive Health Project \(PHP\)](#), [Trans Women's Anti Violence Project](#), [Washington Heights CORNER Project](#), [VOCAL-NY](#), Transmission, [Feminist Press](#), and the [Audre Lorde Project](#)

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