



## **Remarks of**

**Sean J. Young, Legal Director of the ACLU of Georgia**

**Transgender Day of Remembrance, Atlanta**

**November 19, 2019**

My name is Sean Young and I'm the Legal Director of the ACLU of Georgia.

I want to share an important story with you today.

Jenna Mitchell was a transgender woman who lived a challenging but full life before she was ensnared by our criminal legal system and thrown into Valdosta State Prison. Prison officials knew at all times that Jenna had a history of mental illness and suicidal ideation, a condition all too common among transgender people forced to live in society that resists their very existence. While in prison, Jenna was frequently attacked by other inmates or corrections officers.

On December 2, 2017, Jenna's mother called the prison and told them that Jenna had threatened suicide and asked them to put Jenna on suicide watch.

The prison failed to do so. Instead, they threw Jenna into solitary confinement.

Two days later, while in solitary, Jenna told the prison guard that she planned to take her own life by hanging. The guard did not send for assistance. Instead, he encouraged her to do it.

As the guard walked away from Jenna's cell, other inmates told the guard that Jenna was taking steps to act on her plan.

The guard laughed, shouting down the cell block that Jenna should wait until he returned because he wanted to see it happen.

By the time the guard returned, Jenna was hanging in her cell. She died two days later.

These are the allegations in an ongoing lawsuit brought by the ACLU of Georgia on behalf of Jenna's bereaved parents. I tell this story because it deserves to be told, but also because Jenna Mitchell has never been listed as a victim of anti-trans violence for any Transgender Day of Remembrance. And that is because it is impossible to account for all of the invisible victims of transgender violence who are killed in the shadows – in our homes, in the streets, and in our prisons.

By telling Jenna's story, I point to just one brilliant star in the night sky. Jenna is one out of countless other stars that remain unseen or unnoticed, but whom we will strive always to honor ever year on this Day of Remembrance—by not only telling their stories but by honoring their lives and their resilience so that next year there will be fewer people to grieve.