



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Bridgehampton Event to Support New Organization for Highest
Risk Group in Foster, Adoptive Care
Non-Profit Addresses Crises Among
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered Youth**

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Hamptons' resident Walter Donway will host the kickoff fundraiser for a new, non-profit organization that addresses a growing statewide and national problem: the alarming increase of social problems, including suicide, of youth in foster care who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning (LGBT/Q) of their sexual orientation. The fundraiser for A Thousand Moms will be held October 10, from 5-7 pm, at the Children's Museum of the East End in Bridgehampton.

LGBT/Q youth represent an overly high percentage of the total number of youth in foster and adoptive care, according to New York State figures. Drug abuse, homelessness, and incarceration are also at disproportionately high levels. In one telling statistic, data suggests that gay and lesbian youths account for approximately 30% of all completed adolescent suicides, in a report by Lambda Legal Defense, an advocacy group for lesbian and gay legal issues.

A Thousands Moms offers a novel, community-based approach to the needs of this group in foster/adoptive care. The organization will offer the parenting and life experiences of its member "Moms" to counsel families, youth, and social work agencies, with the intention of preventing problems from escalating to serious matters. A Thousand Moms aims to

keep families together, according to Fred Elia, the president, “because families offer the best situations for gay youth, and the costs for state-supported group home care is up to ten times that of state support for foster and adoptive families.” Local chapters of A Thousand Moms are being established statewide and will include New York metro and Long Island communities.

Elia, president of A Thousand Moms, knows well the insecurity and confusion of growing up in foster care--and as a youth questioning his sexual orientation. In 1959, as a two-year-old, he was thrust suddenly into a strange home and family. Living his entire childhood with that same stable, large foster family, he escaped the rejection found then and, alarmingly, now rising, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning youth LGBT/Q) who live in foster or adoptive families. Elia lives today with his partner of 15 years in the same home of his upbringing, an homage to his large, supportive foster- and birth-families.

Elia has spent his working life supporting and improving the lives of youth in the child welfare system. While a state social worker, he established the New York City LGBT Foster Care/ Adoption Network, which recruits foster/adoptive parents. He now continues these efforts in collaboration with the state in upstate areas.

A Thousand Moms, founded by Elia, fellow social workers, and other professionals, believes it’s time to celebrate and support the lives of New York State’s LGBT/Q youth in foster or adoptive care. With the help of private citizens from all walks of life in New York’s communities—anyone can be a “Mom”—the group seeks solutions and reaches out to youth, families, and the state and private agencies who hold legal responsibility for their care. A Thousand Moms' staff is organizing a network of members--everyday citizens--including homemakers, educators, businesspeople, as well as civic and religious leaders, and many others. “A Thousand Moms wants to ensure that these youth be put on a course that leads to productive, positive lives,” says Elia.

A Thousand Moms derives its name from the organization’s dedication to the nurturing, parenting, and support skills of mothers, as well as fathers--and all who support them. The organization also seeks the involvement of civic organizations, businesses, as well as individuals (sons, sisters, extended families, and friends). “We want everyone to participate,” says Elia.

Community education, outreach, and support will be directed at foster/adoptive and birth parents of LGBT/Q youth. The non-profit organization raises funds and establishes contracts with public and private social work agencies, which are the guardians of youth in foster care. By concentrating first in specific regions in New York State (Capital Region, New York City, Long Island, Rochester, Utica, Binghamton, and Hudson Valley), A Thousand Moms will initially be able to measure its effects on the communities it serves.

A Thousand Moms is a Project of The National Association of Former Foster Children, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization established in 1986.

The mission of the Children's Museum of the East End (CMEE) is to create year-round opportunities for children and families to discover their community and world, and to nurture curiosity, self-directed learning, and the joy of discovery through interactive exhibits and educational programs. CMEE provides children with affordable programs and the opportunity to work with talented professionals in the arts and sciences in a safe environment. CMEE is located at 376 Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike in Bridgehampton, NY, and is open from 9am – 5pm, except Sundays: 10am – 5pm and Tuesdays: Closed except for special classes. Tickets are \$7 for children and adults. Children under 1 and Members are Free. (631) 537-8250. www.cmee.org

