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A media frenzy ensued last week when it was announced that Chaz Bono has decided to undergo gender reassignment surgery. Chaz has been a longtime advocate of LGBT rights and is a respected and talented writer, actor, and musician. Howard Bragman, Bono's publicist, confirmed the news and explained: "He is proud of his decision and grateful for the support and respect that has already been shown by his loved ones. It is Chaz's hope that his choice to transition will open the hearts and minds of the public regarding this issue, just as his 'coming out' did nearly 20 years ago." Many members of the LGBT community have no doubt that this news will indeed bring needed positive attention to the "T" in LGBT.

From his first publication, a book about coming-out, *Family Outing*, to his prominent position as GLAAD's Entertainment and Media Advisor, to his taking an act to congress on behalf of the Human Rights Campaign, to his lobbying for Bill Clinton and against the Defense of Marriage Act, Chaz (formerly Chastity) Bono has been a powerful and significant gay rights advocate and leader who has used his fame (first created by being the child of Cher and the late Sonny Bono) to bring attention to LGBT causes and help change the world for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Now, in making the courageous decision to honor his true identity, Bono has again taken on the role of representing a community, and in this case bringing visibility to one that is often misunderstood.

And he has the support of those on the front lines of the LGBT equal rights movement. "Chaz Bono's decision to live his life authentically represents an important step forward, both for him personally and for all who are committed to advancing discussions about fairness and equality for transgender people," said Neil G. Giuliano, president of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD).

Bono came out as lesbian at age 18 to both parents and in the memoir, *Family Outing*, surprised many by saying that his mother and gay icon, Cher, was at first uncomfortable with the news and "went ballistic for a few days" before coming to terms with it. Cher has since become an outspoken LGBT rights activist. However, it wasn't until April of 1995 that Chaz voluntarily came out in an interview with *The Advocate* and proceeded to write for the magazine, become a spokesperson for the HRC, work for GLAAD, and publish two books that focus on LGBT issues. It is this impressive body of work in advocating for equal rights and supporting the community that has made the news of his transition so exciting for those who have long been waiting for someone who could put a face to issues faced by the transgender community.

Although Bono has not personally made any public statement about this news, and it has been asked that his privacy be respected at this time, we look forward to hearing from him soon and praise him once again for his bravery and, as A. Latham Staples, Executive Director of the Empowering Spirits Foundation, stated "commend Chaz Bono for having the strength to publicly announce his transition, and to live his life true to himself," and join with the ESF in the hope that his "strength in this transition will serve as an example for individuals struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity."



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