



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

## Forwarding: Governor Cuomo Announces Dedication of East River State Park for LGBTQ Civil Rights Activist Marsha P. Johnson

BRIAN KAVANAGH August 24, 2020

ISSUE: PARKS, LGBTQ COMMUNITY, BLACK LIVES MATTER, BROOKLYN, COMMUNITY ACTIVISM



### Governor Cuomo Announces Dedication of East River State Park for LGBTQ Civil Rights Activist Marsha P. Johnson

On Her 75th Birthday, Marsha P. Johnson State Park Becomes First State Park in New York to Honor LGBTQ Person and Transgender Woman of Color

## State Will Improve Park Facilities and Install Public Art Celebrating Marsha P. Johnson and the LGBTQ Movement - Largest Investment in Park Since Opening

Images Are Available [Here](#)

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the dedication of East River State Park in Brooklyn for the late LGBTQ civil rights activist Marsha P. Johnson. On her 75th birthday, Marsha P. Johnson State Park will become the first state park in New York to honor a LGBTQ person and transgender woman of color. The State will improve park facilities and install public art celebrating Johnson's life and her role in the advancement of LGBTQ rights. The improvements represent the largest investment in the park since its opening.

"Too often, the marginalized voices that have pushed progress forward in New York and across the country go unrecognized, making up just a fraction of our public memorials and monuments," **Governor Cuomo said.** "Marsha P. Johnson was one of the early leaders of the LGBTQ movement, and is only now getting the acknowledgement she deserves. Dedicating this state park for her, and installing public art telling her story, will ensure her memory and her work fighting for equality lives on."

"New York is the proud birthplace of the LGBTQ rights movement with the Stonewall Uprising more than 50 years ago," **said Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul.** "Today, we dedicate the first State Park in New York in recognition of an LGBTQ hero - Marsha P. Johnson. The Marsha P. Johnson State Park honors the transgender woman of color, who led the fight for equal rights and justice for all. With the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement, now more than ever we must continue the fight for LGBTQ equality and racial justice in our society. We have come a long way with the passage of GENDA and legalizing gestational surrogacy, but we still have more work to do to combat division and hate and

achieve true equality for all."

In connection with the renaming, State Parks installed the first phase of public art. Decorative perimeter fence entrance screening honors Marsha P. Johnson in two prominent locations: The North 8th Street main gate on Kent Avenue, and the corner of North 7th Street and Kent Avenue. Known for adorning herself with colorful flowers, the design reflects Marsha's style and colors. The park also placed interpretive signage outlining Marsha's life and her role in promoting LGBTQ rights and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS.

**Additional improvements to be completed by summer 2021 include:**

- A new park house/education center: The much-needed public park facility will house classroom space overlooking the park, public bathrooms, park ranger contact station and a small maintenance storage area. This 1200-square-foot facility, built in container-style to reflect the rail-to-barge shipping history of the site, is funded in part by grants from Assembly Member Joseph Lentol and New York City Council Member Steve Levin.
- A Marsha P. Johnson art installation: Additional artwork and interpretive materials celebrating Marsha P. Johnson's life, along with other material on the LGBTQ movement, will be installed on two long parallel historic gantry foundation walls, which create a natural outdoor gallery. State Parks will consult with the New York City LGBTQ community on design and content.
- Parkwide infrastructure upgrades to resurface the large but deteriorating concrete pads that host Smorgasburg and other park and community events, add park furniture that better reflect the site's industrial/commercial heritage, rehabilitate the gantry walls and improve stormwater management systems.

- Embellishments of the existing storage building with decorative exterior wall treatments coordinated with fence screening and the Marsha P. Johnson installation.

Known as an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ rights and HIV/AIDS treatment, Marsha was a prominent leader of the Stonewall Uprising of 1969 and later established a shelter in New York City to support LGBTQ young people rejected by their families. She was born August 24, 1945 and died in 1992 at age 46. The investigation into her death, which was reopened in 2012, remains unsolved.

She was a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front, an activist with ACT UP, and a co-founder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, or S.T.A.R., along with Sylvia Rivera. Born in New Jersey, Marsha moved to Greenwich Village after graduating from high school. She turned her hardships and her struggles with mental illness into activism for others, participating in demonstrations with ACT UP and raising awareness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in New York City.

**State Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid said,** "Part of our mission at State Parks is the preservation of the state's historic legacies and making our parks welcoming to all visitors. I commend Governor Cuomo for taking this step for our LGBTQ community."

**State Senator Brian Kavanaugh said,** "While we may often think of New York as a place that is accepting of diversity of all kinds, there is always more work to do, especially for transgender people of color. I am pleased to see East River State Park renamed in honor of Marsha P. Johnson, whom we remember as an inclusive leader and activist who changed lives and inspired many."

**Assembly Member Joseph Lentol said,** "Marsha P. Johnson was a pioneer for the LGBTQ community and her story must never be forgotten. From the Stonewall Uprising and beyond, her activism helped to pave the way for equal rights for the LGBTQ community. Renaming the East River State Park in her name will honor her legacy and tell her story for generations to come."

**Council Member Stephen Levin said,** "Our parks in North Brooklyn are visited by thousands of people every year from across Brooklyn and the city. Open spaces are the jewels of any neighborhood and are used for recreation and leisure by people from every walk of life. To have one of our local parks named after someone as influential and important to the history of our city and the fight for equality everywhere is an honor. Marsha P Johnson spent her life fighting for LGBTQ+ rights and to bring dignity and respect to so many New Yorkers. The new name and planned improvements to the park will show our commitment to providing world class public spaces for everyone."

Formerly the East River State Park, the seven-acre waterfront park offers iconic views of the Manhattan skyline as well as a sandy beach, a native meadow, remnants of an historic rail yard, a rustic playground, a dog run, and facilities for picnicking.

Free and open to the public, the waterfront park is the site of a 19th and 20th century shipping facility. Governor Cuomo announced plans to rename the park in February during a speech in NYC before the Human Rights Campaign Greater New York Gala.

Marsha P. Johnson State Park is one of eight State Parks in New York City. State Parks operates Bayswater Point State Park and Gantry Plaza State Park in Queens, Shirley Chisholm State Park in Brooklyn, Clay Pit Ponds State Park in Staten Island, Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park and FDR Four Freedoms State Park in Manhattan, and Roberto Clemente State Park in the Bronx.

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation oversees more than 250 individual parks, historic sites, recreational trails and boat launches, which are visited by 77 million people annually. A recent university study found that spending by State Parks and its visitors support \$5 billion in output and sales, 54,000 private-sector jobs and more than \$2.8 billion in additional state GDP. For more information, call 518-474-0456 or visit [parks.ny.gov](http://parks.ny.gov), connect on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).