

# MARA KEISLING

b. September 29, 1959

## TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST

*“What’s important is that transgender people are respected as members of the community—that they are safe from discrimination and violence and disrespect.”*

Mara Keisling is a leading transgender activist. She is the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, the largest transgender rights organization.

One of seven siblings, Keisling grew up as Mark in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. His father was the governor’s chief of staff. Mark was a reticent boy. “During junior high, I was shy to the point where I feared giving a book report in front of the class,” Keisling says.

Keisling became more extroverted after joining the school’s Model U.N. Club, where he found his calling in the political arena. He graduated from Penn State and pursued post-graduate work in American Government at Harvard University.

In the 1990’s, after Keisling told friends and family he’d felt like a woman since childhood, he began his transition to Mara. Keisling soon turned to activism after seeing the discrimination transgender people face. Keisling co-chaired the Pennsylvania Gender Rights Coalition and served on the steering committee of the Statewide Pennsylvania Rights Coalition.

In 2003, recognizing the need for a cohesive voice in Washington for transgender people, Mara Keisling founded the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), a social justice organization dedicated to advancing equality through advocacy, collaboration and empowerment.

Keisling and NCTE were among the leaders of UnitedENDA, a coalition of more than 400 GLBT organizations lobbying for a trans-inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

Keisling has over 25 years of professional experience in social marketing and opinion research. In 2005, Harvard University named her Outstanding LGBT Person of the Year.

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