

REMARKS BY DAVID FAIR

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR TYRONE SMITH

June 21, 2025

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This speaking spot was originally set aside for Rhashidah Abdul Khabeer, also known to many as Rashidah Hassan, but she was too ill to join us this afternoon. But thinking of Rashidah makes me want to recognize that in 1985, it was the coming together of three people who I had the honor to introduce to each other – Rashidah, founder of BEBASHI, Michael Hinson, one of BEBASHI's first volunteers, and Tyrone Smith, an independent force of nature – that led to the creation of what I believe was one of the most effective efforts anyway to combat AIDS in the Black community in the nation.

This morning, we honor them all.

I met Tyrone in 1985, over 40 years ago. I was working for the hospital workers union at the time, and I remember encountering Tyrone as he sat in the lobby of our union hall waiting to see me. I had been creating some controversy in the white gay community by pointing out that we weren't doing much for black gay men when it came to AIDS services. This had become important to me as a member of an anti-racist group called Black and White Men Together, and because many of my union's members were black gay men who not only were at risk of AIDS, but were also taking care of people who had AIDS in the hospitals and nursing homes they worked in.

I remember that in our first conversation Tyrone asked me a bunch of questions seemingly intended to figure out where I was coming from. Somehow I passed muster. As we got closer, both as advocates and as friends, I learned that Tyrone was himself a fierce advocate who spent his entire personal and professional life building a community of safety and advocacy for people who we as a society would otherwise never have valued. His single-minded commitment to community is an example I am still learning from.

Tyrone never forgave me for preferring showers over bathtubs – Epsom salts just don't work as well if you're taking a shower – but other than that, I will forever treasure his untiring efforts to make life better for other people, and his courage in sticking to his principles, no matter what.

Thank you.