Trans Latina Activist Ruby Corado Is Eyeing D.C. City Council Run in 2023

Corado recently announced plans to step down as the executive director of her long-running LGBTQ+ center Casa Ruby.

Ruby Corado, a longtime transgender activist and founder of Washington, D.C.’s LGBTQ+ center Casa Ruby, has announced that she will be stepping down as its executive director in 2022. After serving as the non-profit organization’s leader for almost a decade, she tells them that she’s making the choice to make way for new trans leadership and better “ways to support” her grassroots advocacy.

“I never thought I would be here forever,” she says of the decision, which she first announced in a Facebook post on January 4.

A part of her natural duty as a leader, as she explains, is to know when to step aside and allow others to take on new responsibilities. “I want to see more transgender leadership,” she says. “I want to see Black trans women in leadership.” As an example of the kind of rising stars she has in mind, she points to the recent appointment of Khloe Pitts — a Black trans woman who first came to Casa Ruby as someone who needed shelter — as the general manager of the organization’s newest drop-in center in southeast D.C.

In a video announcing her new position, Pitts explains how Casa Ruby provided her the opportunity to grow in both her personal and professional life. “I started from being homeless, nowhere to go, no job,” she says. “… Coming here [to Casa Ruby], getting all these trainings, meeting all these new people of color from all over the world, that’s when I began to volunteer,” until she eventually joined the non-profit’s staff.

“I plan on letting the people in the Southeast area know that they have someone here for them, this can be their safe haven,” Pitts concludes.

Corado launched Casa Ruby in 2012, making the non-profit D.C.’s first bilingual LGBTQ+ drop-in shelter that centers trans and gender non-conforming people of color. She has expanded the organization since to provide food services, HIV testing, clothing, mental health resources, career counseling, and immigration aid.

While facing the COVID-19 pandemic and multiple transphobic death threats, Corado has kept the doors to its 24/7 shelter open throughout 2020, and recently offered emergency refuge to those needing a place to stay during last week’s white supremacist insurrection at the U.S. Capitol building.

“I created a model, based on people of color who are living in margins, coming together,” she beams with pride. “This model centers survivors. It centers people. That is why I feel a lot of people embrace the model, but I see the system rejecting that model.”

Though it’s not the main reason why she wants to leave her role as Casa Ruby’s leader, Corado says that she’s grown increasingly frustrated with the lack of government support and aid — especially as the center has become a pillar of D.C.’s trans community.

She’s not alone in her concerns; multiple reports and studies have shown that non-profit organizations in the U.S. have been chronically underfunded for years, with groups led by people of color even less likely to receive grant money. And these issues have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the state has failed to hand out substantial aid to small businesses and individuals after last year’s initial round of stimulus checks, more people have needed to lean on organizations that provide social services like Casa Ruby. Yet a November study shows that federal government grants and contracts have not been aimed at the non-profit sector, leading to further financial precarity for these organizations at the state and local level.
“67% of daily operations of Casa Ruby is funded by community support, but 1% is funded by government support and private foundations,” she says. “I think there's some work there needs to be done with the government to safeguard the livelihood of people who are living in the margins.”

With the help of other transgender activists, Corado claims that her advocacy work helped secure half a million dollars in D.C.’s 2020 budget specifically for “trans communities and employment.” But in the end, she didn’t see “one of those dollars” going toward a trans organization. “Many of [these politicians] made promises to me, and they didn’t deliver. These are the people who claim to have a progressive agenda,” she explains. “As a result, trans women continue to be killed and [have to] live in survival.”

She adds, “I don’t want to spend my whole life fighting with a system with no intention on changing the lives of trans people.”

Trans Latina Activist Ruby Corado Targeted With Multiple Transphobic Death Threats This Year

“I am not another number,” says the founder of the Washington D.C. LGBTQ+ center Casa Ruby.

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Instead, Corado is considering running for a D.C. City Council seat that will open up in 2023. She says she believes “it will support the vision that I have” for trans and gender non-conforming people to finally get the resources they need to thrive in the city. If elected, she will be D.C.’s first openly transgender councilperson and the city’s second-ever transgender elected official behind Monika Nemeth, who was appointed to its Advisory Neighborhood Commission in 2018.

What’s more, Corado would be just the second transgender woman of color in the U.S. to hold a city council seat after Minneapolis’ Andrea Jenkins.

Ahead of her potential run, she plans to continue her advocacy work by opening up small businesses that she believes “can truly make economic change” for her local trans community. After learning that the city is likely more reticent to make investments into private businesses, she recently launched Casa Ruby’s new pharmacy in D.C.’s Adams Morgan neighborhood. In the near future, she hopes to launch their own for-profit kitchen and co-op that will ideally give trans people jobs, provide alternatives to corporate chains in the area, and “build sustainable support” for the local LGBTQ+ community.

“There’s a perception in a lot of people’s minds that my clients only care about shelter,” she says. “Some of them are engaged in more than shelter. I wanna focus on entrepreneurship.”

https://www.them.us/story/trans-latina-activist-ruby-corado-city-council-run-2023