

Transgender Day of Remembrance



Layla Pelaez Sánchez
1999 - April 21, 2020
Las Piedras, Puerto Rico

Layla Pelaez Sánchez weighed two pounds when she was born, says Ada Meléndez, her grandmother, who raised Layla. After spending a year in neonatal intensive care, she was released from the hospital, after which Meléndez says, “She grew up with me from that moment on.”

Meléndez said Layla was still in the habit of dropping by for breakfast and lunch whenever she was in town.

Layla had spoken to Meléndez about being transgender when she was 11. “[S]he realized she wanted to be a girl, that she wasn’t going to be a man. I accepted her as she was. I accepted her. To her I said, I love you any way you are. If you are like that, then that’s better,” Meléndez said.

Layla traveled from New York City, where she lived in the Bronx, to Puerto Rico on April 21. She wanted to get her driver’s license and have it be issued to her as a female, something her friend, Serena Angelique Velázquez Ramos, had done.

On her death:

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Law enforcement in Humacao got a 911 call on Wednesday, April 22, 2020, after which they found a charred car that contained the bodies of Layla and Serena.

During the investigation, family members pointed out to police that two men had been seen socializing with Layla and Serena on Snapchat the night of April 21.

As per an FBI agent's affidavit, Juan Carlos Pagán Bonilla (Pagan), 21, and Sean Díaz de León (Diaz), 19, socialized with Layla and Serena the night of April 21.

During the investigation, family members pointed out to police that two men had been seen socializing with Layla and Serena on Snapchat that night. Pagan and Diaz had both become angry when they learned Layla and Serena were transgender. The men went for a drive with the women in Layla's car. Diaz shot Serena first and Layla second. Diaz and Pagan then parked the car in Huracao, filled it with trash to make it more flammable, and set the car on fire. Ultimately, Layla's grandmother recognized the car and notified law enforcement.

"On May 1, Pagan and Diaz were charged under federal hate crimes law for Sánchez's death," according to the Human Rights Campaign. Juan Carlos Pagán Bonilla (Pagan), 21, and Sean Díaz de León (Diaz), 19, were "charged by a criminal complaint in federal district court with carjacking and with using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence in connection with the death of two transgender individuals."

Layla's cousin, Luz Melendez, described Layla as "easygoing" and said she was on the cusp of starting to explore the world.

"She didn't have bad friends and she was never in the street. It caught us by surprise since she transitioned so easily and she didn't ever have any issues," said Meléndez.

Español

Layla Peláez Sánchez pesaba dos libras cuando nació, dice Ada Meléndez, su abuela, quien crió a Layla. Después de pasar un año en cuidados intensivos neonatales, fue dada de alta del hospital, tras lo cual Meléndez dice: "Ella creció conmigo desde ese momento".

Meléndez dijo que Layla todavía tenía la costumbre de pasar a desayunar y almorzar cada vez que estaba en la ciudad.

Layla había hablado con Meléndez sobre ser transgénero cuando tenía 11 años. "Se dio cuenta de que ella quería ser una niña, que no iba a ser un hombre. La acepté tal como era. Yo la acepté. A ella le dije, te amo de cualquier forma que seas. Si eres así, mejor", dijo Meléndez.

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Credit: The Americano

<https://theamericanonews.com/2020/05/08/exclusive-how-layla-pelaezs-grandma-and-sister-helped-catch-her-killers/>

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Credit: Multiple web sources that credit the picture to Facebook, including:
<https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/policia-tribunales/notas/allanan-estructura-en-busca-de-evidencia-de-asesinato-de-mujeres-trans/>

Relevant links:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/23/us/Puerto-Rico-Transgender-death.html>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transgender-women-killed-puerto-rico-serena-angelique-velazquez-ramos-layla-pelaez-sanchez-men-detained/>

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https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/reports/2020/04/22/layla-pelaez-sanchez_humacao-puerto-rico_f1a4dfcc

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<https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2020/05/08/alerta-un-tribunal-en-puerto-rico-evaluara-el-as-esinato-de-mujeres-transgenero-como-crimen-de-odio/>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/they-re-hunting-us-two-killed-puerto-rico-were-trans-n1190906>

<https://www.latinorebels.com/2020/04/23/2transgenderwomenkilledpr/>

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/23/us/Puerto-Rico-Transgender-death.html>

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-charges-two-defendants-carjacking-and-carrying-firearm-relation-crime>

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1273056/download>

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-charges-two-defendants-carjacking-and-carrying-firearm-relation-crime>

https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/reports/2020/04/22/layla-pelaez-sanchez_humacao-puerto-rico_f1a4dfcc