

## **Runaway and Homeless Youth Artistic Expression Contest**

### **Alexander Ray Zapata – *Cut Tough***

*Cut Tough* is an identity song. The two main themes of this tune, relinquishing damaging judgment of self/others and the capacity of self-reflection are necessary to have honest conversations, which Alexander Ray Zapata has learned to value and embody as an LGBTQ+ youth. The tone and lyrics' guiding intentions are to build more inclusivity within the music industry, religious institutions, and dominant society as a whole.

Alexander is singing against AND ABOUT church fueled "shaming." The stoning laws in Brunei 2019 inspired him to take time to write out his perspective through song in the form of *Cut Tough*. As of now, 34 states in the U.S. still do not outright ban conversion therapy and offer very limited if not blatantly discriminatory and hateful legislation aimed at LGBTQ+ youth. In addition, the country music community has often ignored the voice of LGBTQ + youth and suppressed their voices from hitting mainstreams platforms. The country undertones and the use of the word young boy are used to directly combat social injustices within heteronormative culture.

Alexander hopes this song can encourage others to adopt more honest conversations in their own life.