



To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Pamela Heller, Policy Intern, CCADV

Date: March 24, 2006

**Re: Raised Bill No. 5597 – AN ACT CONCERNING
DISCRIMINATION.**

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Pamela Heller and I am a student at UConn School of Law and UConn School of Social Work, interning at Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. I am writing today in strong support of Raised Bill 5597: AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION.

Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence is a member of the Connecticut LGBT¹ Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Task Force. The Task Force's mission is to ensure that LGBT survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault receive the best possible services. In order to do this, change must happen at the individual, institutional and cultural levels. This bill would be significant step in the right direction for bringing about system-wide change for LGBT people, and is particularly significant for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people

For any survivor of sexual assault and/ or domestic violence, interaction with law enforcement, medical services, and the legal system is likely. Victims of such crimes face significant challenges when interacting with the individuals and institutions they must turn to for assistance. At each level, the risks for discrimination against LGBT people abound. This bill takes the only possible moral and ethical stance of prohibiting such discrimination.

Some of the serious concerns for LGBT victims of domestic violence in particular may include homophobic reactions by service providers, fear of being “outed” by engaging with the system, a misunderstanding of who the victim is because of misperceived gender roles based on physical appearance, and a general sense that domestic violence does not occur in same-sex relationships.

Much of this bill addresses employment discrimination, and this is also significant for victims of domestic violence. Economic resources greatly impact the ability of a victim to leave an abusive partner. Access to employment is a first step for many individuals who wish to escape violence in the home, and this bill would make it considerably more feasible for gender-variant people to find jobs.

CCADV has already instituted a non-discrimination policy for transgender people seeking our services. We recognize the importance



of protecting all victims of domestic violence, and we hope that the state can extend this protection as well. To do so will be a boon to all residents of the state because we and our families, friends, neighbors, and communities will face a more just future.

Please pass this bill to add gender-variant people to the list of those protected by Connecticut's anti-discrimination laws. Thank you.