

March 24, 2006

RE: HB5597 An Act Concerning Discrimination

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am forty-four years old and have been married since 1988 to a wonderful woman. Together we have two young children, ages nine and five, who we both adore. We own a home in the suburbs, drive a sedan and a minivan, and we care for our dog and cat. Based upon appearances alone, we are the standard American couple, living the standard American dream. But appearances alone can be deceiving.

I am transgender. Now, most people perceive me as a male, and why not. I am genetically male and have physical features that basically match my chromosomes. I wear a suit to work and I have been acting like a man for my whole life. But the truth is that I am not man, I am transgender. My gender identity, or how I see myself, is not as a man. It is something different. Neither man, nor woman. When in the safety of friends and loved ones, I express my gender in a manner that is best described as androgynous. Again, neither being a man nor a woman. This is my gender.

However, when I am out in our society, I am at risk because my gender does not fit within the general rules regarding gender. Dressing in an androgynous manner is not an option at my workplace because the dress code is dictated by whether the employee is a man or woman. I can be sent home to change my clothes and docked pay if my appearance does not match up with the rules regarding how a man must look. In essence, I must pretend to be someone who I am not to avoid problems in the workplace. Currently, Connecticut statutes offer protections for differences in race, religion and sexual orientation, but there are no clear laws to protect me and other transgender individuals, from being discriminated against because our gender identity or expression does not fit within the two choices of man or woman.

When I am out in our society there is no clear law to protect me from being denied public services or accommodations because of who I am. If I appear too different, if I cannot be clearly identified as a man or woman, I am open to discrimination. And if I am open to discrimination, then my children and partner are open to the same discrimination, because we are a family. This is not fair to me, or my family.

I am not asking you to pass legislation so that people will have to accept me as transgender. I know that you cannot do that. But I am asking that you pass a law that will secure my basic rights in our society.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

David Panke
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