

Testimony on Raised Bill HB 5597  
An Act Concerning Discrimination  
March 24, 2005, Judiciary Committee

Pleasant good day, Honorable Chair and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Urania Petit, I live in Hartford and I am an intern at the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund. I am also a graduate student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work getting my masters in the Policy Practice sequence. I am here today in support of House Bill 5597, An Act Concerning Discrimination, and also in strong support of all the recommendations of the Anti- Discrimination Coalition (ADC).

I applaud the members of the ADC for addressing the issue, which helps to clarify and update our current non-discrimination laws here in Connecticut; by pointing out the gaps which we currently have and strengthen our existing laws. The ADC goal is to make the current law which was clarified by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) more explicit and uniform.

Now it is up to us to do the right thing. By that I mean let's give the transgender people who experience widespread discrimination in Connecticut a chance to live a "peaceful" life. A life like yours and mine of not having to worry that we may lose our jobs or never be able to work, to support ourselves and families because of who we are and what we may look like. A life where we don't have to constantly explain ourselves to people why we are who we are.

My first experience working with a transgender client was while I worked at the Department of Veterans' Affairs. That afternoon I was sitting in my office and this veteran came to my door seeking help. I treated the client with respect and dignity because, after all, the client is a veteran. I help the vet with all the necessary paper work and placed several phone calls to different people to get this vet help. When I was done the vet thanked me, gave me a handshake and walked away.

I personally believe that the clarification of our laws is extremely important. It allows people who are vulnerable to discrimination to be aware of the scope of the law and it will also educate individuals like myself about the law. Frankly speaking if someone had asked me a year ago to speak on behalf of this community, I would not have done it or would have done a great injustice to this community. But being at CWEALF, and speaking of my fears, and working with transgender people, I have learned and have grown a lot.

As soon as the vet left the office I ran into the bathroom and washed my hands, and dusted myself off. I was afraid that I may "catch" what the vet had. (I went to tell everyone in the office what had happened to me). I felt dirty and could not understand why people would do "that" to themselves. But being in the School of Social Work and

being at CWEALF I now realize that there is nothing wrong with transgender people. I realize that the only thing that was wrong was my way of thinking and the manner in which I treated this war hero. I was wrong to judge her for being the person that she is and was wrong for not educating myself and being more sympathetic to her needs, since all she needed was to getting her gender status on her Discharged paper (DD214) changed.

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Since then I have become more aware of the transgender community and I have tried to educate my friends and people around me of what I have learned and I also make a great effort to treat everyone in a manner that I would like to be treated.

I know this law will not make people love the transgender community but what this law will do it will send an important message about treating people with respect. This law will prohibit several forms of discriminations such as employment, public accommodations, housing, credit, education and healthcare, etc. I don't want that Vet or anyone else to face that prejudice or stereotype that this war hero did that day in my office. Just like I don't want someone to stop and see me only as an immigrant or a black woman. I want this law to reinforce that everyone should be treated equally with dignity and respect.

Currently, 29% of the country (by population) has a discrimination law that clearly covers transgender people and Connecticut is not one of them. Let Connecticut be counted and reduce the incidents of discrimination and increase the productivity and safety of employees, consumers and residents.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and I hope you will be able to support this bill, not only in the best in the interest of the transgender community, but also in the best interest of the larger Connecticut community. Thank you so much for your time.