

I would like to thank the Chairs, Senator McDonald and Representative Lawlor, Ranking members Senator Kissel and Representative Farr and the other distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me to speak in unequivocal support of H.B. 5597, An Act Concerning Discrimination.

My name is Jerimarie Liesegang and I am Director of the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition. I am here to speak both on behalf of the Ct TransAdvocacy Coalition as well as a Transsexual Woman who has faced significant discrimination, especially in the areas of employment and housing.

I have placed the pictures of my two sons on this table for a very simple reason: To remind us all that this bill goes far beyond the faces and stories you see before you today. That Transphobia and its related discrimination directly touch and severely impact our loved ones: Our parents, Our partners, Our friends, and most importantly *Our children!* That the discrimination that is directed at me also directly impacts them: financially, socially and psychologically! I love my two children unconditionally and with all my heart and their love and respect for me is equally strong and unconditional. So as you consider this bill, please keep in mind that your support of this legislation is not simply assuring non-discrimination for those of diverse Gender Identity and/or Expression but equally important for our loved ones and our children who are directly and severely impacted by transphobic discrimination!

With that said, I am not here to tell my personal stories of discrimination, which you shall hear and read from many others in the community; though rather I am here to testify as the Director of the Ct TransAdvocacy Coalition. I created this organization many years back as a result of the severe discrimination and minimal visibility of the Transgender community. This organization has grown dramatically over the years and works extensively with Service Providers, Case Workers, one on one Advocacy and legislative initiatives.

Sadly, on far too frequent a basis, we receive calls from Transgender people who are or have been discriminated against: be it in Employment, Housing or by Service Providers, to name a few. From both a priori and empirical studies from various states, it is well known that discrimination against Transgender people is rampant. These studies reveal that over 50% of transgender persons experience discrimination based on their gender identity or expression, and for the remaining fortunate enough to be employed most realize annual salaries of less than \$15,000; that housing discrimination based on their gender identity or expression exceeds 40%; that nearly 50% lack any type of health insurance and over 40% are never able to finish high school due to discrimination, and this list sadly goes on.

On another note regarding the impacts of discrimination, many Transgender people and their families have been intimately engaged in the grassroots advocacy and organizing around this bill. However, I would venture to say that though nearly 80% of them desperately desired to testify they instead opted not to testify because of the deep seated fear of discrimination and repercussions of being Outed, of being fired, of being ~~denied~~ educational opportunities! I find this simple fact a clear example of why passage of this bill is so vitally important ~ that this deep seated implicit fear of being Out will result in the rampant and blatant discrimination a person and their loved ones face, simply because they are Transgendered.

At the same time my organization recognizes that passage of such legislation alone won't eliminate the severe discrimination that the Transgender community faces. That education and outreach to corporations, employers, service providers and the like is equally important. And such training is something my organization does constantly with numerous statewide service providers, organizations and institutions. We have consistently found that such education goes a long way to removing the myths and misconceptions many individuals have about transgender. That after even a few hours of education, many recognize that being Transgender is not a choice though rather is a natural consequence of the diversity of sex and gender in the world and in our society. Two important points we stress is that this is not a choice or a lifestyle. Deciding to buy a Mercedes or an in ground swimming pool is a Choice. Being Transgender is NOT. Who would choose to loose so many things in their life such as their family, friends, job, children, credit, education and so on? Certainly for me I did not choose to loose everything in my life to embrace my Gender Identity and Expression. This is a path I had to follow, like so many internal survival instincts

we as human beings have. Society forced this loss directly upon me for being brave enough to recognize and accept who I am. I will not go back into the closet for anyone. I have a human and basic right to exist, to live, to be employed, to have housing and credit, to be a parent and to be a productive citizen in this beautiful and wonderful state of Connecticut.

I urge you all to hear my story, the story of all those who testify in support of this bill here today or have submitted written testimony albeit anonymous and support this legislation, to support the Transgender Community in being productive, useful and contributory citizens of this wonderful state! This legislation is not about Special Rights, it is about Human Rights!

Sincerely,
Jerimarie Liesegang, PhD
Director, Ct TransAdvocacy Coalition

Overcoming Myths and Misconceptions about Transpeople: A real life example.

Excerpts from a University of Hartford Director whose class I recently talked to about being transgendered.

I wanted to share with you some of the beautiful and/or thoughtful comments made by my students about your talk. I cut and pasted these from a web discussion board from my class:

"When JeriMarie first got up to speak I was uncomfortable and nervous. Let alone Transgender, I didnt know what homosexual was until I was about fifteen. When I did come in contact with transgender, crossdressers, and homosexuals I was in Provincetown, Cape Cod. My friends convinced me to go up for a camping trip, and would make it to the bars and whatnot during the nights. While I was in some of these bars I was uncomfortable, guys would whistle at me, passing by shout at me from their cars, and "check me out." Of course my friends enjoyed this but I was actually afraid and nervous. However, when JeriMarie began speaking about how hopeless she felt, unable to get a job, couldnt see her children, and on the verge of taking her life. Well, I could relate. I wasn't looking at what she was wearing. I wasnt concerned if she was going to behave like the individuals in Provincetown. I looked her straight in the eyes and became emotionally attached. She was alone, desperate and isolated from the world, probably more so than anyone of us have experienced. She just so happens to be a very intelligent and worthy human being and I wish her the best."

"I agree, as I heard Jerimarie talk, and I heard what difficulties she had to face and overcome by becoming transgendered, my heart went out to her. I saw the look in her eye as she spoke and I related to her feeling of abandonment and isolation. Having her talk made this transgendered issues seem very real, here was this intelligent caring person telling us about all the discrimination she faced by changing her gender. After this talk I became angry at how something as little as what we choose to wear is seen as a mark on who we are as a person. We are all supposed to be equal, and have the same rights, yet it is uncomfortable for her to even walk down the street without being harrassed. The judgements we make against each other are so harsh and based on things many of us do not even understand. I am proud for her that she took and stand, but I am also saddened that even now, it is still difficult for her to be accepted by most people."

"I took the psych class on human sexuality as a freshman. I had gay friends growing up but was still very naive and had a lot of questions about transgender and transsexual issues. When we were studyign these issues, a panel of about 5 or 6 men and women came in to talk to the class. Some of them had recently decided to change over, and some were fully changed, surgery and hormones and all. Gerimarie was also present at that elcture. The first time I saw her and the others speak I was very nervous and taken back, yet excited, becasue I was seeing and learning something new and did not know what to expect. It was very, very beneficial for me to be put in this situation a second time because I saw how much she has grown as a person over the last 4 years, but I also realized how much I had grown. I was not only more comfortable with the situation but I found myself concernened with different issues and with more questions and speepley touched by her story. I was intersted and caring 4 years ago when I heard her speak, but I

supposed I ahve matured and the shock value of it was no longer there and instead, this time, it was simply a story of growing and finding yourself and dealing with lifes turmoils and I was simply impressed. I wish her all the best, and I wish everyone else the courage to be as strong and original in a rough society."

"GeriMarie was a good candidate to pick to inform us about this issue because she approached us with a calm and open attitude and seemed very approachable. When she first walked in I admit I was a bit uncomfortable, only because I kept looking at her, not even sure why just because she was different I guess. She has been through so much in her life and I give her so much credit for coming to a college campus and putting herself out there. I have so much stress with family and school and social life, I can't imagine adding on the stress of not knowing what gender I am supposed to be. I admit I still can't fully understand her situation because of course I have never experienced it but I have definitely grown a greater appreciation for the struggle of transgendered people."

"I am going to be completley honest now... When I was walking in to class the day JeriMarie came to speak, I saw her in the parking lot. I said out loud to two friends of mine... "Whoa, Thats not a woman..." and continued to talk about whether she was a male or a female. Then when she came into the classroom my heart dropped!! I couldnt believe that she was going to be the speaker... and I was talking about her in the parking lot. After hearing JeriMarie, I felt so guilty about talking about her... but then again, she re-assured us by telling us not to feel guilty about the things we might think or ask about her situation. I am so honored to have met JeriMarie and I plan on having a meeting with her to help me with my paper. I am so excited and am grateful to be able to say that I know someone who is a transgendered female and be totally cool with it! Thanks!"

Thanks for coming. As you can see, you are making a difference