

Testimony Regarding Raised Bill # 5597
An Act Concerning Discrimination
Presented to the State of Connecticut General Assembly, Judiciary Committee
Friday, March 24, 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is **Kathryn Caristo**, and I am a graduate student at the University Of Connecticut School Of Social Work. I am also employed as a Unit Director at a nonprofit organization, located in Southeastern Connecticut.

I am here to speak in favor of a concept to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression in state funded employment, education, and housing settings as specified in An Act Concerning Discrimination.

I ask you to take a moment to observe my wardrobe. You will notice I am wearing a blazer, shirt, and slacks. This morning I fulfilled my job duties with the knowledge that I would be evaluated by my supervisor based on the tasks I completed. I had confidence that my attire was in accordance of my employer's dress code and would not negatively impact my employment. It is plausible that if I were employed sixty years ago, I would not have the same confidence in my choice of clothing. In fact, I may have feared that I would be reprimanded or possibly terminated solely because I am a woman who wore slacks to work.

I now respectfully ask the General Assembly to consider whether it would be equitable for my employer to gauge my performance based on this standard. I believe that many members of the General Assembly will share my perception; the choice to wear slacks is not a relevant measure of my performance. Again, I would not be so certain of your response to this question were it asked sixty years earlier.

I feel fortunate to live in an era and geographic location in which my gender identity and expression is accepted. It is unlikely that my employment, education, and/or housing will be adversely affected by how I express my gender. I do not take this luxury for granted. I am aware that transgendered individuals are not always afforded the same basic opportunities that I and other Connecticut residents enjoy.

Gender identity and expression, as it manifests in appearance or behavior, is not an effective measure of employment and/or academic performance. Furthermore, gender expression and identity bare no significance when predicting the ability of individuals to successfully acquire housing. Consideration of these factors in employment, education, and housing serves only to promote discrimination.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and I hope you will endorse this bill. The concepts proposed will promote equity for Connecticut residents regardless of how they exercise their right to express their gender identity.


Kathryn Caristo