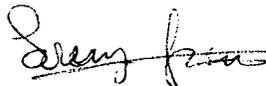


March 24, 2006

Good afternoon. My name is Lorenzo Jones, and I am an African-American community organizer who has been working for many years in the city of Hartford. I am writing in support of H.B. 5597, an act concerning discrimination. As a Black man who lives every day with the reality of race discrimination and its effects on my community and my people, I have had to fight to survive in a country that devalues my people's history and my people's culture. Even though I have dedicated much of my adult life to this fight for equality, I have had to deal with my own attitudes and prejudices about transgender people, and have been challenged in learning to accept and understand their struggle and their reality. People I have worked with closely in recent years have helped me see through the labels and the stereotypes, and maybe some of my own fears too. I now see that transgender people are full human beings who deserve to be treated with the same respect as you or me—no more, and no less.

I think it's important to add "gender identity or expression" as a category of protection in Connecticut's nondiscrimination statutes. Anyone who has ever lived outside society's made-up definition of "normal" knows that people don't always respect what they don't understand. Having the law behind you doesn't guarantee that you'll be understood by your employer, your landlord, your real estate agent, your school principal, or the local PTA. What it can do, though, is give you some legal protection from that lack of understanding, and give you the chance to take your rightful place in the community and earn some respect for your abilities and your wisdom. People need jobs and homes and educations no matter how they look, where they come from, who they love, how they pray, or what they wear. If we don't put the pressure on society to make room for everyone, sooner or later, we'll find ourselves getting squeezed out next. We have to stick together and fight oppression where we see it. This bill does that, and we shouldn't back down from it.



Lorenzo Jones

Racism is the root and foundation that makes all the other "ism"s rational.