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TESTIMONY

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing
March 24, 2006

Senate Chairman McDonald
House Chairman Lawlor

H.B. No. 5597 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION

Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of the essential civil liberties and individual rights of the citizens of the State of Connecticut.

My name is Rachel Goldberg and I reside in the City of Stamford, Connecticut. I am Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition ("GenderPAC"), the national organization working to end discrimination and violence caused by gender stereotypes by changing public attitudes, educating elected officials and expanding legal rights.

GenderPAC is a part of an Anti-discrimination Coalition of organizations and groups from around the State of Connecticut and the country engaged in a passionate and unrelenting struggle for justice. Dr. Martin Luther King once said "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

We are here today seeking justice in the form of an amendment to the Connecticut General Statutes which will provide explicit protections for individuals who may be victims of discrimination because of their *gender identity or expression*. We believe that these issues are a part of a larger civil rights struggle for basic fundamental human rights – freedom, human dignity and justice.

I am here today to urge you to support and pass Raised Bill #5597: "An Act Concerning Discrimination."

Transgender people are everywhere; in the corporate boardrooms, in academia, on factory floors, preaching from pulpits, in hospital operating rooms, in court rooms; working as nurses, doctors, lawyers, managers, artists, research scientists, and even politicians. We are in schools, in theater on airplanes and standing next to you in the grocery store checkout line.

Unfortunately, transgender people face serious discrimination in the workplace, housing and public accommodations. All too frequently, transgender people are fired the moment their employers learn of their background. They are often targeted as they try to find a place to live and are regularly asked to leave restaurants, hotels, stores, medical facilities and educational institutions and are subjected to embarrassment, public humiliation and even physical harm.

As an attorney practicing law in Connecticut I have represented a number of transgender individuals who were threatened with the loss of their jobs because they decided to transition (change their gender identity and/or expression). Prior to the year 2000 every one of those clients lost their jobs.

On January 31, 2000, I filed a petition with the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities asking that they issue a Declaratory Ruling that the statutory prohibitions against discrimination based on sex encompasses discrimination of transgender people. On November 9, 2000, the CHRO did indeed issue that Declaratory Ruling.

I am pleased to say that the Declaratory Ruling has been somewhat successful. Unfortunately, however, there have been a number of employers who have disregarded the Declaratory Ruling by arguing that it does not correctly reflect the Connecticut General Statutes. In each of those cases my clients were terminated. By passing HB 5597 you will make the law in Connecticut explicit and uniform.

In the past ten (10) years corporate America has recognized the value of its transgender employees. Today more than 100 of the nations largest and most influential corporations have added "gender identity and expression" to the internal HR policies, including important Connecticut companies such as Aetna, UBS and Xerox.

In addition to my chairmanship of the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition and maintaining a small private law practice I am also employed by the City of Stamford Urban Redevelopment Commission as its general counsel. A few years ago I became the first employee of the City to publicly transition on the job. In contrast with the experience of the clients I mentioned earlier, my experience has been very positive. Almost without limitation everyone with whom I interact in the performance of my job has been accepting

and/or supportive, be they politicians (local, state or federal – from both sides of the aisle); government employees; consultants; contractors; and ordinary citizens.

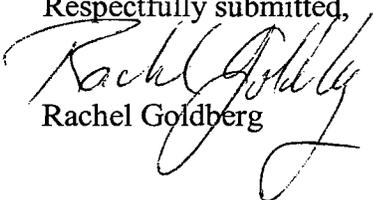
I am hopeful that with the passage of HR 5597 everyone covered by this law will enjoy a similar experience.

Civil rights are positive legal prerogatives; the right to equal treatment before the law. No one should lose their job or be denied a place to live because of their gender identity or expression.

When I was in grade school Dr. King electrified the nation when he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and told us about his dream. In words no less eloquent for their brevity Bobby Kennedy said “some men see things as they are and say why, I see things that never were and say why not.”

Pass Raised Bill 5597.

Respectfully submitted,


Rachel Goldberg