

I am here to submit this written testimony in favor of HB# 5597, an act concerning discrimination to add gender identity or expression to the CT non-discrimination statutes.

I submit this testimony in memory of my dear childhood friend Lisa. Named Clarence at birth and born with male genitalia, Lisa named herself by age 4 and consistently identified as female. She was my girlfriend, my jump rope playmate, we did everything together. Her short and tragic life is an example of the horrendous intersections of racism, classism and transphobia. Lisa was black, poor and transgender.

We were among the first children to be bussed from Trenton New Jersey to suburban schools in the late 1950s. Everyone had new clothes, including Lisa. It is not that her parents were so progressive; they were too ill to notice, protest or support. Her mother was psychotic and spent afternoons wandering our neighborhood talking to the dirt, occasionally throwing a knife into it while she cursed. Her father was tragically alcoholic and rarely indoors. No social workers crossed into our neighborhood. No one was concerned with the health and well being of Lisa and her four siblings.

Lisa *wanted* to fit in, to belong. Her circle was small, me, her cousin and my best friend Ella and her sister, Sheila. Sheila bought Lisa conservative clothes for our debut in suburbia with money she made selling sex. We got off the bus in plaid, navy knee socks and peter pan collars. Lisa was with us less than one full day in school. This is where the State came in, to protect the good and well to do from an 11 year old transgender child!

They sent her to a jail they called a hospital for mentally ill children where she was raped, belittled and battered. When they released her as an adolescent no public school would register her, no job training program would accept her and no one would hire her. So she went to work with her sister and repented every Sunday.

The passage of the Civil Rights Act protected only part of her, and since she could not separate (no one could) the black from the trans from the poor, she had no protections.

Lisa believed in Jesus and went from church to church, each time being asked to leave. We established our own backyard church. Every Sunday Lisa stood on my back porch and sang, "How Great Thou Art". The only

time I was put out of church was when Lisa, Ella and I went to a local tent revival. The minister announced with his microphone, "Will the man in the dress, please leave my sanctuary?" She called aloud, "Help me, Help me, Help me Lord Jesus." Ushers rushed over, one taking each of her arms and carried her out, Ella and I in tow. While the church doors were closed, the doors to a bar were open to us. I was 14.

I went of to college. My mother called to tell me that Lisa had thrown herself onto a train track; she was cut to pieces.

I tell this story because it is not over. I see it re-played today in the lives of transgender youth and adults. Passing this bill is a matter of life instead of death. A 14 year old trans youth here in CT recently asked, "Is there any work we can do besides be prostitutes?" Another was not placed when she signed up for the government funded and administered Summer Youth Employment Program. She had no legal protections. Do we want youth to learn to work and earn or do we want to arrest them over and over, watch them die from addiction and a life of selling sex?

I witnessed the exploitation, humiliation and abuse of transgender women in the late 1970s under the guise of "workfare". I directed a City program that provided training and job placement to those on the now dead and buried General Assistance or "City Welfare". Workfare required recipients of assistance to work for the City. Transgender women on City assistance here in Hartford were routinely assigned to the police department or public works where they were verbally and physically harassed. They had been harassed and threatened and beaten out of school and were being punished for not working. They had not legal recourse. Put up with it or lose the \$200.00 a month. No one would hire them.

I started a support and job readiness group and was told that this was not a proper use of government funds. There was no legal recourse. I watched them die, murdered, suicide, overdosed, live and die with AIDS. Among them were bright minds, hard workers, determined and resilient individuals who could have been teachers, doctors, Senators.

Within the mind of a trans man or woman, boy or girl, may be the cure for AIDS or cancer. Discrimination that starts in schools flushes away potential.

The social workers that sentenced Lisa to a childhood jail and torture chamber could have worked to defend her right to an education. It is too late for her but the opportunity is here today to not only save lives but to promote an equitable quality of life for a population that has always existed in every part of the world, in every society.

The lack of inclusion of transgender people in non-discrimination statutes is nothing less than uncivilized. If we are civil people, we will insist that civil rights be guaranteed to all of our citizens.

I therefore urge you to pass HB# 5597.

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