Testimony of David Waren
On Behalf Of The
Connecticut Regional Office of the
Anti-Defamation League

IN SUPPORT OF
HB 5723
AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION

March 19, 2008

My name is David Waren and I am the Director of the Connecticut Regional Office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 with a mandate to fight the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment for all. Today the ADL is one of the country's leading civil rights organizations.

I am here today to express our strong support for House Bill 5723, which would update and clarify Connecticut's anti-discrimination statutes to explicitly protect individuals from discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, credit and education based on their gender identity or expression.

A critical element of ADL's mission of seeking justice and fair treatment for *all* people compels us to combat bias and discrimination in whatever form it takes and against whomever it may be directed. Others here today will describe in greater detail how individuals are discriminated against simply because they do not meet societal expectations of what it means to be a man or woman. In our experience, discrimination against *any* individual or group of people not only hurts the individuals it targets, but negatively impacts the environment in which it arises and the community as a whole. Fortunately, Connecticut's discrimination laws provide significant protection to many classes of individuals subject to discrimination as well as meaningful avenues for responding to such discrimination. Discrimination based on one's gender identity or expression, however, is as pernicious as discrimination based on those categories explicitly prohibited by current law such as race, sex and religion, and should receive equal and unambiguous protection under the law.

Although the CHRO has ruled that protection against discrimination based on sex encompasses gender identity and expression, the ruling does not have the effect of clearly protecting transgender individuals by statute, and therefore fails to send a clear message to employers, landlords, educators and the community that discrimination based on gender identity or expression is impermissible. Extending explicit protection from such discrimination will deliver a powerful deterrent signal to those who may contemplate acting on their prejudices.

We urge you to join 13 other states that have passed similar legislation. This simple change in the law that will send a clear message that no one deserves to suffer discrimination because of their gender identity or expression.

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