

In Support of HB 5723, An Act Concerning Discrimination
Connecticut Judiciary Committee, 19 March 2008
Mr. Barb Greve, M.Div.

My name is Barb Greve and I testify before you today as a transgender guy and person of faith, currently residing in Hamden, Connecticut. I serve as the Interim Director of Religious Education at the Unitarian Society of New Haven and am a candidate for the Unitarian Universalist ministry. I am here in support of HB 5723 because I believe it is important to protect all people from discrimination. I care not only because I myself would be protected by this legislation but also because many people I know and work with—family, friends, congregants, fellow clergy and people of many faiths—want these protections to become law.

In 1995 I came out as a transgender guy. As I became more public about my transgender identity I was pleasantly surprised by the acceptance I received from my colleagues and other religious leaders. In the 10 years that followed my coming out I was privileged to work with religious and secular institutions as they struggled with how to best be welcoming and supportive towards transgender people. Through both my professional work and my own lived experience I am encouraged that while many people do not understand transgender identity and expression, they are willing to learn about it in order to be supportive toward transgender people.

Accompanying others as they reach a place of acceptance and affirmation of my transgender identity has been and continues to be a sacred journey, something for which I am eternally grateful. Throughout this journey my soul continues to open to the beautiful diversity of creation and to the many ways in which humans grow and change over a lifetime. This legislation is part of the ongoing process of making it safe for *all* people to live their own authentic lives in safety.

From 2002 – 2007 I attended Starr King School for the Ministry in California where I was fortunate to be a graduate student in an academic institution that had already done some work around understanding a multiplicity of gender identities and expressions. My arrival at the school gave me cause to interact with many aspects of the institution, from the Registrar, to my advisor, to the President of the school, to staff – all of whom were understanding and supportive as I navigated through forms and protocols. I was relieved when my seminary created and posted transgender-inclusive signs on the bathroom doors.

Having been raised in Massachusetts, I was delighted to be hired by the Unitarian Society of New Haven to serve as their Interim Director of Religious Education; thus giving me the chance to return to New England and live closer to my family. While my family and congregation are very supportive of me, I know that they worry about the discrimination I face in my daily life.

Shortly after I moved to Connecticut I went to the Department of Motor Vehicles to transfer my driver's license. I had in hand my valid Massachusetts driver's license and the proper documentation for proof of identity. After a long wait I was denied a Connecticut driver's license. When I asked for a reason the clerk told me he did not believe the documents were real or accurate. Since the documents are both real and accurate, I can only understand this as transgender discrimination. Just as the current law protects others who are in danger of discrimination, this addition to the law would have made it possible for me to simply get my driver's license without harassment. This is a chance for the State of Connecticut to say that discrimination against anyone is wrong.

Three times in my working life have I clearly been discriminated against in regards to employment. The inability to support myself was discouraging and embarrassing. The pain and worry that these times of unemployment caused are immeasurable. In recent years I have limited myself to working in arenas where I know some transgender rights education has been done. In serving as an intern minister and as an interim director of religious education, my experience as a transgender guy has served more as an asset than a liability. Whether or not I publicly identify as transgender shouldn't matter. None of us should have to fear that we may be denied equal access to housing, education, credit or jobs because who we are challenges other people's ideas about gender identity and difference.

Even with these difficulties, I have been extremely lucky compared with many other transgender people who can't find work or housing and are harassed and beaten for who they are. No one should have to rely on luck to find housing. No one should have to rely on luck to be hired or to keep their job. No one should have to rely on luck to obtain a driver's license or safely live their lives. As a citizen of CT, I hope that you will make it possible for people like me to rely on the law rather than luck.

I have been blessed to work in a congregation and denomination that really means it when it says it supports all people. So let there be no mistake: there are many people of various faiths who are supportive of transgender people, and there are many transgender people who are people of faith. The covenant among people of my faith tradition calls for us to work for "...peace, liberty, and justice for all" and to "...promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person." HB 5723 is in keeping with our covenant, and I am proud to support it. I urge you to support this legislation and ensure that the legislature has an opportunity to pass it. Thank you.