

**TESTIMONY OF LOUIS HABER
IN SUPPORT OF HB 5723
MARCH 19, 2008**

Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Louis Haber, and I am here to testify in support of HB 5723, An Act Concerning Discrimination.

As someone who loves Connecticut, has lived here for nine years, and is raising four children here, it is especially gratifying to be testifying on a proposed bill that can make Connecticut even greater.

Some members of the legislature, when they decided to run for office, may never have envisioned having to vote on this particular issue. Until recently, I had never given the issue much thought.

Perhaps like some of you, I first became aware of the issue of gender identity when Dr. Renee Richards made headlines in the 1970s. Since then my understanding of the subject has increased a little over time.

When I was in college, for example, I learned that one of the professors was a transsexual. It may sound hard to believe, but I never heard a single derogatory remark about this professor's decision to transition biologically from male to female. I feel privileged to have attended a school where it was the norm to respect this professor and fully accept her as a member of the community. Of course, the community benefited enormously: She was a renowned expert in her field and a star teacher.

I have also worked for major corporations where I have had transgender colleagues.

But the issue of gender identity and expression became much more immediate for me when, last year, my eldest child, now in college, told my wife and me that she felt her gender was different than her biological sex. Even though she had always been a tomboy, it was the first time we saw her self-expression as a manifestation of her gender identity.

My daughter is respected and admired by those who know her. She is a top student, a hard worker, and caring person. And nothing has changed: She's the same wonderful person she always was. We just know and understand her better.

Perhaps some parents may have taken the news that their child was questioning her gender as tragic, but over the years I had learned that gender identity is just one more aspect of our diversity.

It is tragic, however, when people are prevented from fulfilling their potential because of discrimination. It's tragic for the victim, and also for our society.

As a parent for whom this issue is very real, I know that treating people who are transgender as equals is not a matter of so-called “political correctness.” It’s a matter of fairness, a value that is a pillar of our democracy and at the heart of our country’s success story.

And at a time when our state and country is in desperate need of talent, we simply can’t afford to marginalize people because of their gender identity or expression – or for any other type of discrimination that has already been outlawed.

Sadly, we know from the testimony that you are hearing today that discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression takes place, even in our great state.

Perhaps you may never have thought that, as state leaders, your personal journeys would bring you to the decision you have to make on HB 5723. The good news is that you now have a wonderful opportunity:

- an opportunity to make Connecticut an even better place for all who live and work here, for all who want to contribute to its wellbeing and prosperity...
- an opportunity to teach our children that it is wrong to discriminate against a person on the basis of that person’s gender identity or expression...
- an opportunity to uphold the principle of equal opportunity that is so crucial to our way of life...
- an opportunity to pass HB 5723.

I hope you seize this opportunity. Thank you.

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