

**Judiciary Committee**  
**March 19, 2008**  
**HB 5723**  
**An Act Concerning Discrimination**

My name is Dr. Laura Saunders and I have been asked by the anti-discrimination coalition to speak about concerns that have been raised in relation to transgendered teachers and their impact on young children.

I am a licensed psychologist specializing in child and adolescent development and psychopathology. I have been working in this field for 18 years.

The issues of greatest concern when we discuss the impact on young children are their social, emotional and psychological health. First we need a more clear understanding of the relevant developmental issues. Gender identity is the child's identification of himself or herself as a male or female. This means that for the great majority of children by age 3, a child's understanding of their biological sex and their internal feeling of maleness or femaleness is clear. A 3 year old could identify themselves as a boy or girl and identify each person in a room as male or female. In typical development, a child's interests and play coincide with their gender identity. Multiple factors determine core gender identity including biological, genetic and experiential influences. By the time a child enters elementary school at age 5 their gender identity is more firmly secure and is not subject to undue influence by others.

In reviewing the literature, the academic research on transgendered teachers and their impact on children, is virtually non-existent. What exists is mostly single case studies and anecdotal stories. There is small body of research done on the children of transgendered parents. These studies conclude that children of transgendered parents are NOT negatively affected by their parent's gender dysphoria. None of the children of transgendered parents developed any characteristics of their own gender identity disorder. Thus, no child raised by a transgendered parent had any negative psychological impact. This is far greater contact and influence than a teacher would have on a student.

It can be assumed that the fear in allowing a transgendered teacher in the classroom is that they would create anxiety and confusion in their students and, at worst, stir gender confusion or arrested gender development. There is absolutely NO scientific evidence to support this fear. Additionally, there is no evidence that children have been traumatized by exposure to transgendered adults. Atypical gender expression is not in any way contagious.

An age-appropriate explanation of gender variance can be easily provided for those children who are educated by transgendered teachers. Positive interactions with transgendered people increase positive attitudes, break down stereotypes and increase awareness and understanding; these interactions do not damage our children, their development or their education.

It is important to remember that children are tolerant and flexible in their thinking and can understand experiences different from their own. This only serves to enhance children's empathy and their appreciation of diversity.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura M. I. Saunders, Psy.D.  
Licensed Psychologist  
Child and Adolescent Services  
Institute of Living  
200 Retreat Ave  
Hartford, CT 06106  
(860) 545-7009