

Jerimarie Liesegang, PhD
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I would like to thank the Chairs, Senator McDonald and Representative Lawlor, Vice Chairs Senator Handley and Representative Fox, Ranking members Senator Kissel and Representative O'Neill and the other distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me to speak in unequivocal support of HB 6452, An Act Concerning Discrimination.

My name is Jerimarie Liesegang and I am Director of the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition. However today I am not here to testify on behalf of the CT TransAdvocacy Coalition but rather I am here to provide my personal testimony as a Transsexual Woman and Mother who has faced significant discrimination, especially in the areas of employment and housing.

I have placed the pictures of my two sons on this table for a very simple reason: To remind us all that this bill goes far beyond the faces and stories that you see before you today. That Transphobia and its subsequent discrimination directly touch and severely impact our loved ones: Our parents, Our partners, Our friends, and most importantly *Our children!* It is a simple fact that the discrimination which I face directly impacts my two sons: financially, socially and psychologically!

I will relay one simple example of the discrimination that I faced in employment. I had owned a company based out of Connecticut that had approximately ten employees. My company contracted to Fortune 50 Chemical and Pharmaceutical companies. Sadly as I began to transition and live my life as a woman, my key clients refused to accept me and asked that I stop my "act". I told them that this is not an act but that this is who I am. Sadly the contracts that they had previously renewed with me ended and within six months my company had no major Fortune 50 clients and I was eventually forced to close my business. Facing financial ruin I was forced to seek employment within the corporate world. I remember that within days of putting my resume out on Monster.com I received numerous responses remarking at my strong credentials and that they were very interested in interviewing me and that they had a number of positions open that matched my qualifications. Sadly as I went to each interview, though the interviewers were polite it was clear they were uncomfortable in the presence of a Transsexual and I literally would not hear back from them following the interviews. Eventually I realized there was a pattern: positive and strong communication with the prospective employer prior to their meeting me and then total silence and zero communication following the interviews. Oddly prior to my transitioning I never had trouble landing the job I wanted; and within weeks of my searching. On paper I was a dream candidate to them, however when they realized this qualified candidate was a transsexual they refused to communicate with me. The pattern continued un-relentlessly: *We would like to get you in for an interview immediately and after seeing me they would not return my emails or calls!*

I finally reached desperation and as I went on an interview that I knew I was again well qualified for I told myself I would not leave the interview without a firm commitment to hiring me. Otherwise I would not hear back as with all the other interviews. When I was finishing my interview I concluded by saying "I would like you to know that I would really love to work here" and the interviewer said "yes we really like you and will be in touch". I then said a second time that "I REALLY like the job and would love to work here". The interviewer again smiled and she reiterated again that she really liked my qualifications and they would definitely be in touch. Nearly begging I said a third time that "I REALLY like the job and would love to work here". At that point she smiled and asked me to wait. She left and when she returned in about 10 minutes she had a letter typed up that was an offer for employment. I succeeded in leaving with a job offer in hand! Within three months I learned that if I had left the interview without finalizing an offer I would likely have never heard back from her. It turns out that about a week after the offer was made the president of the division that hired me was outraged that she hired a transsexual. He stated that how could their division employ a transsexual as an internal company consultant to their other divisions? She remarked that they only needed to look at my credentials to realize I was eminently qualified for the position, and that they got me at a cheap price! I had learned this information about three months after being employed there from a friend who was actually in this meeting. My first few months were so bad that a group of women on one floor of the building signed a petition to refuse to allow me to work with them or to use the bathrooms. Fortunately the company did not entertain this petition and put it to rest. I knew that I needed to work ten times harder each day to prove myself to them. And I did. I have now been

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with the company for nearly seven years and they now say what can we do to keep you here. In fact I am now an Assistant Director in this company and they have included Gender Identity and Expression within their Corporate Non-discrimination policies. They and my co-workers eventually learned to look beyond my gender identity and expression and to realize I was a loving, caring, intelligent and hard working employee like everyone else!

Sadly I am the exception. If it were not my credentials of a BS, MS, PhD, a postdoctoral study with a Nobel Laureate at Harvard, and Executive MBA and years of diverse experience, as well as a very strong will, I would be unemployed today and possibly dead. The depression that rejection and discrimination poses is unbearable and I am one of the fortunate stories, if you call this fortunate.

I urge you all to hear my story, the story of all those who testify in support of this bill here today or have submitted written testimony albeit anonymous and support this legislation, to support the Transgender Community in being productive, useful and contributory citizens of this wonderful state! This legislation is not about Special Rights, it is about Human Rights!

Sincerely,
Jerimarie Liesegang, PhD

Overcoming Myths and Misconceptions about Transpeople: A real life example.

Excerpts from a University of Hartford Director whose class I talked to about being transgendered.

I wanted to share with you some of the beautiful and/or thoughtful comments made by my students about your talk. I cut and pasted these from a web discussion board from my class:

"When JeriMarie first got up to speak I was uncomfortable and nervous. Let alone Transgender, I didnt know what homosexual was until I was about fifteen. When I did come in contact with transgender, crossdressers, and homosexuals I was in Provincetown, Cape Cod. My friends convinced me to go up for a camping trip, and would make it to the bars and whatnot during the nights. While I was in some of these bars I was uncomfortable, guys would whistle at me, passing by shout at me from their cars, and "check me out." Of course my friends enjoyed this but I was actually afraid and nervous. However, when JeriMarie began speaking about how hopeless she felt, unable to get a job, couldnt see her children, and on the verge of taking her life. Well, I could relate. I wasn't looking at what she was wearing. I wasn't concerned if she was going to behave like the individuals in Provincetown. I looked her straight in the eyes and became emotionally attached. She was alone, desperate and isolated from the world, probably more so than anyone of us have experienced. She just so happens to be a very intelligent and worthy human being and I wish her the best."

"I agree, as I heard Jerimarie talk, and I heard what difficulties she had to face and overcome by becoming transgendered, my heart went out to her. I saw the look in her eye as she spoke and I related to her feeling of abandonment and isolation. Having her talk made this transgendered issues seem very real, here was this intelligent caring person telling us about all the discrimination she faced by changing her gender. After this talk I became angry at how something as little as what we choose to wear is seen as a mark on who we are as a person. We are all supposed to be equal, and have the same rights, yet it is uncomfortable for her to even walk down the street without being harrassed. The judgements we make against each other are so harsh and based on things many of us do not even understand. I am proud for her that she took and stand, but I am also saddened that even now, it is still difficult for her to be accepted by most people."

"I took the psych class on human sexuality as a freshman. I had gay friends growing up but was still very naive and had a lot of questions about transgender and transsexual issues. When we were studyign these issues, a panel of about 5 or 6 men and women came in to talk to the class. Some of them had recently decided to change over, and some were fully changed, surgery and hormones and all. Gerimarie was also present at that lecture. The first time I saw her and the others speak I was very nervous and taken

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back, yet excited, because I was seeing and learning something new and did not know what to expect. It was very, very beneficial for me to be put in this situation a second time because I saw how much she has grown as a person over the last 4 years, but I also realized how much I had grown. I was not only more comfortable with the situation but I found myself concerned with different issues and with more questions and steeply touched by her story. I was interested and caring 4 years ago when I heard her speak, but I supposed I matured and the shock value of it was no longer there and instead, this time, it was simply a story of growing and finding yourself and dealing with lifes turmoils and I was simply impressed. I wish her all the best, and I wish everyone else the courage to be as strong and original in a rough society."

"GeriMarie was a good candidate to pick to inform us about this issue because she approached us with a calm and open attitude and seemed very approachable. When she first walked in I admit I was a bit uncomfortable, only because I kept looking at her, not even sure why just because she was different I guess. She has been through so much in her life and I give her so much credit for coming to a college campus and putting herself out there. I have so much stress with family and school and social life, I can't imagine adding on the stress of not knowing what gender I am supposed to be. I admit I still can't fully understand her situation because of course I have never experienced it but I have definitely grown a greater appreciation for the struggle of transgendered people."

"I am going to be completely honest now... When I was walking in to class the day JeriMarie came to speak, I saw her in the parking lot. I said out loud to two friends of mine... "Whoa, Thats not a woman..." and continued to talk about whether she was a male or a female. Then when she came into the classroom my heart dropped!! I couldn't believe that she was going to be the speaker... and I was talking about her in the parking lot. After hearing JeriMarie, I felt so guilty about talking about her... but then again, she re-assured us by telling us not to feel guilty about the things we might think or ask about her situation. I am so honored to have met JeriMarie and I plan on having a meeting with her to help me with my paper. I am so excited and am grateful to be able to say that I know someone who is a transgendered female and be totally cool with it! Thanks!"

Thanks for coming. As you can see, you are making a difference

