

**TO: CONNECTICUT HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**  
**RE: Testimony in Support of HB 6452: An Act Concerning Discrimination**

To Chairman Lawlor and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am here to ask that you extend Connecticut's protections against discrimination to persons who identify with a gender role different than their biological sex by passing HB 6452.

I am a long-time Connecticut resident, a Professor at Rutgers University, and a specialist in violence against women and children whose research and testimony before this House Committee helped pass landmark legislation protecting victims of domestic violence and their children in the 1980's. I am again asking you to recognize the full personhood of a class who are routinely denied the full dignity to which all citizens of our great state should be entitled as a birthright. But I do so today not as a researcher or professor but as a father of a transgendered son who was born biologically female.

Our child was named Rachel at birth. But from very early in childhood, this 'girl' acted and dressed like a 'boy.' We did not comprehend what this meant (or did she) and believed she was going through a 'stage,' even when, almost as soon as she developed prominent female physical characteristics, she insisted that the image she saw in the mirror felt alien and that the body into which she was born was "not me." In grammar and middle-school in New Haven, Rachel functioned normally, or so it seemed, largely because, other than some formal events involving our parents, there were no occasions where she had to wear dresses or display other symbols of femininity. We interpreted her anger when we referred to our three biologically male children as "the boys" as sibling rivalry.

We now appreciate the psychological turmoil she was undergoing even then, experiences shared by thousands of young people in our state. These feelings became increasingly manifest as pressure to be 'act like a girl' mounted in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. At Hopkins High School, she "came out" as "trans." She spent a disastrous semester at a high school in Ireland, where she was expected to wear a skirted uniform and play competitive "kissing" games with boys (which she always lost). She was also having academic difficulties which continued into college and which we now know were the result of "gender dysphoria," a condition that is brought on almost entirely by the felt discrepancy between what you appear and are expected to be and who you "know" you are.

We owe her survival during this period to support from fellow students, from GLSEN (an Connecticut organization of educators who support gay and trans youth), and to the annual "Children of the Shadows" conference in Connecticut which brings together over a thousand children with "ambiguous" sexual identity from the state. In a dramatic act, Rachel (now known as "Sparky") set chairs at various points on her high school campus, each with the name of a transgendered youth who had been killed because of their gender identity. The effect was electrifying. For the first time, we came to appreciate the risks she faced as soon as she stepped outside the insulated world she had built to protect her.

Talk of surgery began almost as soon as Sparky entered college in Massachusetts. We were terrified. But we also understood that transgendered persons who choose not to undergo the risky surgery and hormone therapy needed for a complete transformation can face the sort of discrimination and harassment dramatized by Hillary Swank in the film 'Boys Don't Cry' because they act or dress differently than they appear. At each point in the process, we had to undergo education, not least from our child. With our support, Sparky officially became Eli and, after dropping out of school before graduating because of the conflicts associated with gender identity, had surgery so that others would see the same person he was. None of this altered his humanity or his capacity to fulfill his obligations as a citizen, employee, parent or partner, the basis for our claim to rights. Eli is now 23.

Over the last few years, Eli has faced enormous obstacles because of discrimination, primarily but not only in the workplace. He has been redirected to use female restrooms by security guards, told to dress "right" by employers, harassed by police, faced difficulties with bank accounts, passports, cashing checks and so on. Numerous corporations—including Aetna, Apple Computers, Eastman Kodak, Intel, Verizon Wireless, and Xerox—have adapted policies that protect transgendered people. But the types of jobs available to most young people are not so enlightened. This makes the Bill before you even more pressing.

Opponents of this Bill argue that sexual predators will use the cover of anti-discrimination to gain access to women in restrooms. The reality is that high school students are far more accepting than their principals of the fact that transgendered youth already use facilities consistent with the gender identity. This problem is not avoided by denying them equal rights.

But rights require respect and respect for transgendered persons must be learned just as we've learned to respect other groups who are different than ourselves. This Bill is part of that education process.

I meet people from every walk of life – students, teachers, doctors and lawyers, plumbers and bus drivers, parents, spouses, and children-- whose efforts to find secure, fulfilling employment are also a struggle to provide for their families. The time has long passed when we as a state or a nation can tolerate arbitrary discrimination against any group of people. That any hardworking transgender American should be denied the full dignity of their personhood or limited because of discrimination in their ability to learn or contribute to the national economy and support his or her family is simply unacceptable.

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