

HB 6452 An Act Concerning Discrimination

A Father's Story

(testifier asked that his name be kept confidential to protect the identity of his daughter)

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to speak here today and I ask you to vote in favor of HB6452 An Act Concerning Discrimination.

I am up here today as the loving proud father of a transgender child. I will not be using names or locations because that child is a minor, amid a quest for identity that stretches the limits of what teenagers must go through. That journey has been a dangerous one for my daughter.

She and I live in a southern CT suburb with my 85 year old father. I never dreamed seventeen years ago that I would be here today. Often back then, we exchanged thoughts as we spoke of the potential future for the beautiful baby boy I cradled in my arms at our dining room table. We spoke of tossing a football and teaching him to use tools, a college education and teaching him to become a standup guy.

We now sit around the dining room table with that same child, and talk about *her* newest hairdo or blouse. We joke and laugh about our favorite sitcoms. We fight over whose turn it is to get 'Grandpa's' dessert from the kitchen or do the dishes.

It's been a rocky path. In nursery school my son often dressed up as his heroes, Mary Poppins or Cinderella and would do scenes from the movies with the other children. A few parents complained and wanted it stopped or him out of the class. I guess that was the first example of bias in my child's life. The nursery school teachers stood their ground though.

Through elementary school my son tried to fit in, adopting more accepted attire, looking for acceptance from the other little boys in the neighborhood. It never seemed to work out though. Always the fish out of water. Teased and bullied, unhappy and often angry. I wondered what happened to the happy toddler that loved to laugh and play. I thought back to the day the next door neighbor walked over and said how remarkable my three year old's laugh was. That it just seemed to resonate out through the neighborhood.

High school hasn't been easy. As a freshman my child was openly part of the GBLT community and began wearing makeup. I marveled at the courage to face the taunts and harassment. Friend's parents would not allow their children and mine to associate. There was a physical attack, hospital stays, declining grades and school transfers. There was also therapy, wonderful support groups, and everyday family and friends who stood by us.

In an attempt to find a safer environment, the school system sent my child to start at an alternative town program for students. I had been specifically told by administrators that my child was **not** a behavioral problem, yet I learned the program was for students with behavioral problems. The same student that had physically assaulted my daughter a year earlier was also assigned to start there on the same day.

Eventually we changed to homebound instruction with a tutor sent by the school. Despite a possibly tougher curriculum of written work, now able to focus without the taunts and thrown wads of paper, able to be herself, my daughter's grades have gone from F's and D's as a 9th and 10th grader to the most recent semester's 2 B's, 4 B+'s, and an A+. Now she talks about college instead of dropping out, the possibilities of what she could be in life, instead of settling for a field where she is more likely to be accepted. That shows me the will and inner strength that is often stanchued and wasted when society has cast someone to the side because they seem different.

Recently I pulled into the driveway with my daughter and her friend, someone who simply accepts her as she is...they stepped from the car joking about a project they were working on, just typical teens. Then I heard it, that deep remarkable laugh that use to resonate from her belly through the neighborhood when she was little and allowed to be herself.

We still sit and discuss the potential future around the dining room table... We pride ourselves in this country on raising our children with the belief that they can be anything they want to be, study, work hard, and achieve The American Dream.wait though, I am the father of a transgender child, society asks me to present a different version of the American Dream to my child..... "You can be anything you want to be, but ummm, you can't be who you are. Not who you truly are anyways."

There have been previous battles over discrimination, but have we learned from the ranks of those who we tried to leave behind, came some of the most brilliant scientists, productive business minds, thoughtful leaders, and inspirational teachers and legislators, all across and interwoven through our society, defenders and champions of the same society that once dismissed them.

My child, like other transgender children and adults I've had the privilege to meet, are bright, articulate compassionate human beings with the same potential, character, and integrity that we teach and preach about in our homes and schools and houses of worship, with that same potential to be decent responsible keepers of the American Dream, striving for a chance to be productive and of service in society.

They inspire those around them with their courage in the face of adversity, harassment, discrimination and outright hate. They suffer injustices because they are true to who they really are.

Don't limit their choices with your choices. Don't let them be beat down and cast aside. The sadness and tragedy you hear about related to people whose gender identity and expression does not match society's, is not a symptom of their identity or truths. It is not a symptom of the clothes they wear, or the makeup they may or may not wear. It is a symptom of other people's perceptions and fears and discriminatory practices. Sadness, discouragement and fear are not likely to coexist in the hearts and mind of someone who feels accepted, loved, and free to flourish to their true potential.

Allow them to be what they can be, by first allowing them to be who they are. Anything less is a disservice to society. A disservice to the ill child who one day may be cured by the work of a transgender scientist, to the child who may be inspired to greatness by the gender non conforming professor, and certainly a disservice to truth and human rights. This is a troubled world, we need people to live up to their potential. Choose truth by passing this bill so that every citizen of this state may be allowed the opportunity to reach their true potential.

Please pass this bill, HB6452. Thank You.