

Testimony on H.B 6452
An Act Concerning Discrimination

Thank you for listening to my testimony. My name is Michelle Hansen and I live in Waterbury. Among other things I am an Episcopal Priest, but I used to earn my living in the computer industry. I worked for a medium size computer repair and training company in Plantsville, Connecticut. I had worked for this company for almost 18 years and was their senior technical trainer. I had a spouse and a family.

A week after notifying my employer of my future plans to transition from male to female I was released. I was given a three page lawyer prepared letter. The letter did not explain the reasons why I was laid off but did specify all the reasons that were not responsible for my lay off. In addition, I was offered a small severance if I would agree not to sue them. They had just hired two other engineers who were not fully trained or certified. It is clear that they were thinly veiling their true reasons for letting me go. I was released *before* I began my public transition. I was released when they learned I was transsexual.

I have not worked a full time job since that day. When I was released I lost my short and long term disability insurance. Two months later I was diagnosed with cancer. I have been treated and I am now on disability. I have two Master's degrees from Yale and I have a long list of certifications in the computer industry, but still have no job. I am now trying to start my own business, but it is a long process and I still have substantial health issues.

I believe that H. B. No. 6452 AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION is essential to protect the rights of all people no matter what their gender identity or expression. There is almost nothing as fundamental as the ability to work. It is necessary to provide food and housing for one's self and one's family. It is also important to a person's individual sense of self worth. Take away a person's right to work and you force that person into desperation and despair. It is hard enough to support one's self these days without having to deal with prejudice.

Transgender individuals are very much like everyone else in most ways. The way they are different is that their birth gender is different from their mental gender. Being transgender is from birth and lasts until death and is not a matter of choice. As a transgender person I struggled for years knowing that my birth body was wrong for my perceived gender. There is no cure for being transgender. The only successful treatment is to live in the gender that the brain accepts.

I can tell you all that no transgender person wants to be humiliated, to be taunted or shamed. No transgender person wants to be beaten, punished or fired. We all want to feel self worth and to support ourselves and have warm housing. Transgender individuals are a minority and largely misunderstood. We need legal protection. We need the protection of HB 6452.

I feel that it is important that this bill doesn't ask for money or for special privileges. It does ask for protections of rights that all people have come to expect in our State and in our Nation. Gender discrimination is one of the last and most insidious forms of discrimination. This committee has been supportive in the past years and I hope this support will continue and that this is the last year I will have to submit my testimony. With the passage of this bill I hope that there will be no further stories like mine.

Thank you,

The Rev. Michelle Hansen, S.T.M, M.Div., BA