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Testimony of Gloria Long, 114 Warrenton Ave, Hartford, CT 06105

Good afternoon, Rep. Lawlor, Sen. MacDonald, and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am here to support House Bill 6452, *An Act Concerning Discrimination*, which would add gender identity or expression to Connecticut's non-discrimination laws. Transgender and gender non-conforming people – your constituents, the people in this room – face discrimination every day that none of us should have to bear. Passing HB 6452 would bring CT in line with 13 other states that already make it illegal to fire people, or deny them credit or housing, because of who they are. And by making our state a more welcoming, diverse and fair place to live and work, Connecticut would reap the benefits.

For the last 19 years, I have been an art teacher in Hartford. I have taught from Pre-School to 12th grade, from the North End to the South End of the city. Art education teaches students to feel comfortable asking questions, and to find multiple solutions to problems. There are many factors that contribute to academic success. But perhaps the most critical that I've noticed is that a student feels safe and comfortable. Without that basic security, learning doesn't happen-- in any classroom.

The impact of legislation cannot be underestimated. Thanks to legislation, teachers are formally empowered to enforce the rules of non-discrimination in their classrooms. Without comprehensive legislation, students can look at me and think, "oh, she's just a peacenik."

For 19 years I've done everything in my power to make my classroom a no bullying zone. When my students use racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or any other derogatory words against their classmates, I explain why those words are hurtful, and why that behavior is not accepted by society. Bullying is not just "kids being kids." It's a serious disruption to the learning process. It's a serious blow to an individual's self-esteem, a barrier to a child's survival, and a certain obstacle to his pursuit of greatness. Relentless bullying happens for many reasons, but I've noticed that frequently victims are girls who dress in "men's" clothing or boys who appear "too feminine." I am grateful that CT has strict anti-bullying laws – but I urge you to add "gender identity or expression" to those protections. I would like every student in my classroom to be treated fairly and to know that the State of Connecticut will not condone abuse of any student by any members of the school community. There's no reason why any child should be left out. No form of hatred should be legitimized by the State.

I want my students to grow up not just tolerating each others' differences, or condoning each others' behaviors – I want them to celebrate that each of us are unique, and have a special contribution to make to our communities, just as light, shadow, hue, tone, and color all contribute to a painting on a canvas.

I want kids to grow up in a state that respects who they are and encourages them to contribute to their schools, their colleges, and their workplaces with their fullest potential. I urge you to support HB 6452. Thank you for your consideration.