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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
HB 6599 AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and distinguished members of the judiciary committee. My name is David McGuire. I am a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut and I urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 6599, AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION.

Transgender people often face pervasive discrimination in virtually every aspect of life. Discrimination based on gender identity or expression is a serious and real problem in Connecticut. At the ACLU-CT, we respond to phone calls and letters from transgender people and their families regarding discrimination. People who do not perfectly fit into conventional ideas of male or female gender roles are often victimized when engaging in activities most people take for granted, such as checking into a hotel, attending school, eating at a restaurant, and using public transportation.

In 2004, the Connecticut legislature demonstrated its understanding of the challenges faced by transgender people when it passed a transgender-inclusive hate crime law. In 2000, the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) issued a declaratory ruling indicating that transgender people are protected under existing Connecticut sex discrimination laws. These are important steps to protect transgender people but more is needed.

It is fair to say that most people in Connecticut are not familiar with CHRO declaratory rulings, let alone the significant ruling referenced above. Connecticut has no explicit law protecting transgender people from discrimination in employment, education, housing, and public accommodations. Adding the phrase "gender identity or expression" to current non-discrimination laws will codify statutory protection for transgender people. This addition will formalize protection for transgender people and educate the people of Connecticut that it is unlawful to discriminate against people due to their gender identity or expression.

A growing number of states, cities, and towns prohibit discrimination against transgender people. Thirteen states and 110 cities and counties have laws that protect transgender individuals, including California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia. These laws cover 40% of the U.S. population.

Please vote in favor of this important bill that adds gender identity and expression as a protected characteristic to Connecticut's non-discrimination law. This action will ensure a more fair and just Connecticut.