

Kallista H. Solyn

Testimony in support of

House Bill 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination

March 21, 2011

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kallista Solyn and I live in Bozrah, Ct. I am a constituent of Connecticut State Representative Kevin Ryan and Connecticut State Senator Edith Prague. I'm here today in support House Bill 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination.

I am a transsexual woman and began my transition in 2005. I started living full time as a woman in 2006 and had Gender Reassignment Surgery in the fall of 2007. Like most transsexuals I began my transition with the understanding that I would likely face a great deal of adversity. I prepared for the possible eventuality that I would be abandoned by both my family and my friends. I was pleasantly surprised. Although far from a walk in the park, my transition went remarkably smoothly. With only a few exceptions, my family and friends were very understanding and accepting.

I was hopeful that my transition in the workplace would go equally well, but I was quickly disappointed. At the time of my transition I was working for a privately owned, aviation related business Located in southeastern Connecticut. While the vast majority of my co-workers seemed to handle my transition well, there were some exceptions. Unfortunately, among these were my immediate supervisor, and the owners of the firm. Within several days of disclosing my intention to transition I was asked, by the firm's owners, to "do the right thing for the sake of the company, and resign". I refused, and explained that it was my belief, that remaining and continuing to perform the duties of my position was the right thing to do for the company. In a subsequent, closed door and private, meeting with my supervisor I was told that he believed that my transition would result in a company-wide exodus, with my co-workers quitting in large numbers. He went on to say that he felt "very protective of the company" and that he would "do whatever was necessary to protect the company" including if necessary, my termination. None of my co-workers in fact quit, and the vast majority appeared to have little difficulty with my transition.

Additionally, I was on more than one occasion, required to meet, again in closed door private meetings, with my supervisor. I was told in great, and uncomfortable detail, how I should dress to best minimize any expression of femininity, and downplay the obvious effects of my gender change. As a woman I was made to feel very uncomfortable by these conversations, and I verbalize this. In response he said that he "was within his rights as my supervisor to dictate how I should dress on the job". It was painfully clear to me that I was not being asked to adhere to a company dress code, but

rather I was being asked to adhere to an expression of gender that was not my own. I was being asked, as a woman, to adhere to a stereotypically male gender expression.

I loved my job and I was fond of the vast majority of my co-workers. I was in the process of transition with associated medical expenses that were both daunting and seldom covered by my medical insurance. For these reasons I continued to work in what was an increasingly hostile and difficult environment. I was good at my job and learned to live with the undermining and unnecessary difficulties that were continuously thrown in my direction. In my optimism, I honestly believed that I could weather these difficulties and return to some reasonable degree of employment normalcy. I believed that given time, those few individuals within the firm that seemed to be so averse to my transition, would learn to accept me as the person that I had always been, but once again, I was wrong. The recent economic downturn caused a slowdown in our business and I became, (I believe), a target of opportunity. The nature of our business was such that the slowdown had not affected my office, nor would it have for some time. Additionally my position within the firm was, in fact, mandated by the Federal Aviation Administration, and could not be eliminated. I was none the less, after 14 years of service, and without a dime of severance pay, unceremoniously dismissed. "You no longer work here" I was told by one of the firm's co-owners, followed quickly by "how soon can you clean out your office and be off the premises?"

At the urging of a close friend, and with a glimmer of hope that I could possibly reclaim my job, I consulted an attorney. He was highly recommended and specialized in labor law. He listened patiently as I explained, in great detail, my situation. His response was disappointing, if not surprising: "If the state of Connecticut had added gender identity or expression to the anti-discrimination law, you would have a case against your former employer" he said. "But without that protection you have little or no recourse. I would simply be wasting my time and your money to take this case".

I have now been out of work for over two years. I've had to sell my home to avoid foreclosure, and I've lost my medical insurance. I am now on the brink of bankruptcy, and were it not for the kindness of friends, I would almost certainly be homeless. My situation is unfortunately, far from unique. Stories like mine are all too common in the transgender community.

Being transgender is not a "phase or a lifestyle". I was born this way and I can no more change my gender identity than I could change the color of my skin. Transgender people like me are routinely fired, denied jobs and promotions, denied housing and accommodation, and denied credit by organizations that enjoy complete impunity in their actions. I'm not asking for "special rights or privileges". I'm only asking for fairness, and freedom from discrimination for all Connecticut residents.

As a transsexual woman, a lifelong Connecticut resident and as a Human being I would like to thank the honorable members of this committee for hearing my testimony and to urge you to support House Bill 6599: An Act concerning discrimination.

Thank you.