

Nicole Fink
Testimony in support of HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination
March 21, 2011

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Nicole Fink and I am currently a resident of Brookfield and a Graduate Student at the UCONN School of Social Work.

I am here today in support of House Bill 6599. Throughout my life, I have always had the security of being protected by Connecticut's non-discrimination laws. I have never had to worry about being denied employment opportunities, medical services or housing because of my identity as an Asian American female, however the transgender population of Connecticut cannot say the same thing, including several of my friends. For example, during his transition, one of my friends was so fearful of retribution in the workplace that he became severely depressed, borderline suicidal, and had to seek intensive mental health treatment. It was difficult watching one of my friends suffer and not being able to help him. He feared losing his job and income and not being able to stay in school because he could not afford to if he lost his job.

According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force), 83% of Connecticut respondents reported experiencing harassment or mistreatment on the job, 27% lost a job, 24% were denied a promotion and 43% were not even hired. No person should have to be fearful of being fired or denied promotions because of their identity. In today's struggling economy, Connecticut should take extra steps to ensure that all of its residents are given the opportunity to get back to work.

Individuals of the transgender community have also reported harassment, physical and sexual violence at the middle school, high school and college levels because of their gender identity and expression. For some, the harassment is so severe that it results in these individuals dropping out of school. A friend who works directly with transgender youth in CT has told me many stories about the experiences of transgender youth that are like my friend's story...

Because of the lack of education as well as employment discrimination, transgender individuals face a higher risk of unemployment and are more likely to live in poverty. As an ally to the transgender community, I firmly believe that all residents in the state of Connecticut deserve fairness and equality and the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. Adding gender identity and gender expression would not only make our state's non-discrimination laws stronger and more explicit but also create a policy that is uniform in protections to all. By adding gender identity and expression to Connecticut's non-discrimination laws, Connecticut is upholding our state's commitment to fair treatment and freedom from the discrimination for all its citizens. Connecticut has the responsibility to protect all of its residents regardless of race, color, religion, age, marital status, national origin, sex, or physical disability, and now it has the responsibility to protect those based on gender identity and expression. Now is the time for Connecticut to take a stand and a step closer to equality for all its residents.