

**Ashley McGuffie: Testimony in support of HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination, March 21, 2011**

Madam/Mr. Chairman and members of the committee; my name is Ashley McGuffie; I reside in Fairfield, CT and I am speaking on SUPPORT of HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination.

As a lifelong CT resident, United States Marine Corps Veteran and recipient of the CT Veterans War Time Service Medal, I cannot stress enough my support of HB 6599. I joined the USMC delayed entry program in October 2011 as a 17 year old high school senior from Fairfield High School, as a means of defending my country and the rights of ALL US citizens following the September 11 attacks. From March –June 2002 while most of my peers and class mates were participating in traditional high school rites of passage such as senior prom, applying for college and preparing for graduation I was in USMC basic training preparing to be a defender of my country by honoring the lifetime MC values of honor, courage and commitment and the US values of freedom and justice for all. I stand before you today, 9 years later, to continue my defense of ALL US citizens.

As a member of the LGBT community living in CT, a state that at times can seem like a LGBT rights oasis, it is easy to overlook some issues in lieu of recent rights we have attained, however I cannot stress enough that passing HB 6599 is imperative to the LGBT community's health and existence. We live in a time where it is not enough just to survive as a community but is essential to thrive. In order to do so we must be equally protected under the law as employees, families and citizens regardless of our gender identity or expression. Passing this bill will add CT to a growing list of states that support full equality and will reaffirm our state's commitment to fair treatment and freedom from discrimination for all its citizens, a fight that I have personally waged as a CT student, Marine, a lesbian and as an advocate.

As I look around this room today I see not just friends and loved ones but parents, students, professionals, children, teachers, and most visibly, people who have experienced disproportionate amounts of discrimination based on their gender identity and expression. They deserve the dignity as members of not just the LGBT community but of the entire CT community to have equal protection under the law for housing, employment, and access to services regardless of clothing or other people's perceptions. As a child and adolescent mental health professional and as a LGBT youth leader I have experienced firsthand the tremendous damage that can be done to young people and families who are forced to live in fear of being who they are. But more importantly I have witnessed and experienced the power of resiliency and healing that comes with the validation and security of being protected from discrimination. Many of you are seated here today because of your promise to CT voters to uphold fairness and equality for all CT residents. As I have the honor, courage and commitment to stand here today as an advocate, I expect you to uphold your word of promoting freedom and justice for all.

Thank you for your time.

Ashley McGuffie

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