

HB 6599

March 19th, 2010

Dear right and honorable ladies and gentlemen of our state legislature, it is with earnest hope and concern that I present these words and thoughts in testimony on behalf of the cause of equality for all persons regardless of gender identity, gender expression, or gender orientation. As a citizen of the fine state of Connecticut and this country of the United States, I feel it is my obligation and responsibility as a citizen to exercise my right to hold my government representatives accountable for their actions or lack thereof in the cause of the promotion of freedom, equality, and prosperity for all who claim citizenship of this state and country.

As a citizen, it is to my understanding that we as a unified but diverse people of various races, cultures, religions, creeds, personalities, and ideologies can and must transcend these individual distinctions for the sake of promoting and defending our most universal natural, inalienable, human rights. It is to my understanding, as a citizen of sound mind and fair judgment and understanding of our nation's history that we as Americans, as a people not bound by any one particular, dominant religion, one particular, dominant political ideology, one particular, dominant race, or one particular, dominant voice of authority have held dear these established truths through a democracy of dialogue and weighty debate: *That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, whomever or whatever that Creator may be, with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the *consent of the governed*, That *whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness.* Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. *But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.*

It is with these words and principles established from the birth of our nation's government that I write in support and defense of my rights not only as a citizen of Connecticut and these United States, but as a *transgender* citizen of Connecticut and these United States. In regards to the matters at hand, as a citizen, I am entitled to these certain inalienable rights of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. I am entitled, as a native-born citizen of Connecticut, (born in Hartford, Connecticut on August 17th 1975), and native to these United States, to the rights, protections, privileges, and responsibilities and obligations of citizenship. If we as a people hold it to be true that all men are created equally, than I am no more or less a citizen than any other citizen here today. Therefore, I cannot, in good faith or conscience, grant my consent to a government that would act in defiance or neglect of these statements and deny me and other transgender individuals and communities these inalienable rights. It is my right as one of the people, to seek and call for a government that will alter itself or abolish itself until it can institute a policy where the principles of equality for *all* its citizenship is recognized,

defended, protected, and unilaterally applied justly, fairly and equally across all parameters, distinctions, definitions, and spectrums of humanity.

By definition of these inalienable rights and by definition of what we may commonly understand and agree upon as the rights, protections, obligations, and responsibilities of citizenship, as a transgender citizen, I am entitled to the safety and shelter of my own home if I am able to own a home or rent a home or have even a room in which to live in granted me by the generosity of a friend. I am entitled to pursue gainful employment for the purposes of providing for the prosperity and happiness of myself and those of my choosing, and for the purposes of payment of taxes for the support of local, state, and federal necessity—provided that employment is available to me as a member of the transgender community that does not endanger my safety, well-being, or limit or hinder my potential or dehumanize and denigrate my worth as a productive citizen. If employed, I have the right to my dignity, integrity, intellect, skills, talents, and pride. I am entitled to protect and defend my state of employment through due process and legal means if a labor dispute were to unfortunately arise. I am entitled to choose and pursue a respectable profession or occupation I feel most suited to, provided that such employment is available to someone identifying as transgender. I understand that employment opportunities are available to all citizens meeting the requisites of their chosen profession or occupation. I am entitled to pursue an education in any public institution of my choosing, provided that I have the means to pay for said education and abide by the policies and admissions processes of the educational institution. I am entitled to an education in an environment of safety, pursuant to my right to life and liberty and pursuit of happiness. I am entitled to receive the same level of public services, utilities, and public benefits as my tax money and financial contributions to society provides for. I am entitled as a transgender citizen to fair and equal care and treatment in matters of law, personal safety, health, security, and employment. I am entitled to the same measure of personal freedoms as any other citizen. I am entitled to the same rights and protections as defined by our U.S. Constitution and the constitution and legal statutes of our state of Connecticut as well, if it is understood and can be established that I was born in Connecticut, in the United States, and that I am not the child of an illegal immigrant.

It must be made clear that as I write these words and state my own declaration of my rights as a citizen, this declaration and this understanding I have does not seem to reflect the reality in which I and other transgender individuals live. Currently, the right to pursue and maintain gainful employment is not guaranteed me in fair and equal terms as it is other citizens. I can be fired or terminated and discouraged from employment solely on the basis of my gender expression, gender identity, or gender orientation regardless of my merits, academic background, credentials, or work performance and potential productivity. There is no legal recourse in place to protect my right to pursue fair employment or to protect my right to work and be employed.

The right to fair and just treatment in matters of health, legal recourse, my education, my right to safe housing, and my right to equal services for the pursuit of personal safety, security, health... life, liberty, and happiness are not afforded the same level of support, defense, or seriousness as other fellow citizens. As a transgender citizen, I have been told that I may never hope to be hired as a full-time elementary school teacher. Yet teachers are expected and mandated to teach all children regardless of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion,

ethnic background, socio-economic background, cognitive ability, and so on. We understand and commonly believe that no child should be left behind or turned away from attending school and from the best educational opportunities that can be reasonably provided. We are aware though that a child may be bullied, harassed, or tormented if they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or especially transgender. What message does it send to the transgender student that they can attend school but only at great risk? What message does it send if we tell the transgender student that they might be asked to learn and develop in an environment that is hostile to them? And what message is sent then to that transgender student fortunate enough to have attained their high school diploma or degree? Do we tell them that they may never be able to aspire to be anything but homeless, jobless, disenfranchised, and disregarded as a human being? Can we honestly tell them that they, as transgender, can aspire and achieve like anyone else here in the country that has often prided itself on being the "Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave"? Or must we hold our tongues or lie to the transgender community and ourselves because we must judge people's worth and value as citizens on their gender identity or gender expression? What message is conveyed if people are judged not on their intellect, character, creativity, morals, and personality but on whether or not they are male enough to be male or female enough to be female?

As a member of the transgender community, I may be brave for striving to be myself. I may be intelligent, thoughtful, articulate, creative, passionate about my goals of becoming an educator, and may be regarded as brave for being honest. However, as circumstances now stand, can any member of this state's legislature or of our nation's Congress assure me with full confidence that I am as free and equal and they are? If it can be said that I am a citizen, can it also be said that I am free to benefit from the rights of a citizen as an equal? Or have I been lied to and misled? Has it been made explicit that *all* citizens are free of discrimination and therefore equal, regardless of gender expression and gender identity?

I have been told that the unemployment rate for transgendered persons is at least three times as high as that of the national average, perhaps even higher. I have seen police and medical personnel refuse to treat, help, or assist members of the transgender community on the basis of their gender identity or expression. I have come to understand that businesses have routinely denied services and products and business to the transgender community based solely on their gender expression or gender identity and their inability or preference not to conform to gender specific stereotypes. Banks can refuse to provide loans to potential transgender homeowners. Landlords can refuse to provide apartments or housing to transgender individuals despite the equal housing lender provisions and current equal housing statutes in place. Hospitals and clinics can refuse to treat transgendered patients on the basis of their gender identity. Insurance companies can refuse to provide health coverage for transgendered individuals in need of necessary medical care, medical treatments, and even routine medical visitations.

Many rights and privileges most citizens take for granted or enjoy without thought, conscious awareness or concern are being earnestly fought for and yet denied by the transgender community. As an enlightened nation, these United States have acted in the past to correct our errors of judgment and re-establish our sense of morality. When we determined that slavery was abominable and disgraceful, we abolished the institution of slavery. We recognized that the

hundreds of years of bigotry, racism, and the subjugation of a proud and dignified people worthy of respect had to end. We as a nation recognized the importance granting equality, dignity, and respect to women, recognizing the grave errors made in denying women the right to vote and to live as freely and equally as men. We have acted to correct the errors following the attack on Pearl Harbor, when we wrongfully interred 110,000 law-abiding Japanese Americans in camps like Manzanar and Minidoka and Tule Lake for the duration of World War II. We have acted to correct for past neglect of the physically and mentally challenged, the elderly, the disadvantaged, and the returning veterans home from serving in foreign wars.

We once recognized that the strength of our nation can best be determined by how we treat those least fortunate and most suffering among us. We have often opened our arms to the poor, tired, hungry, and downtrodden of the world. Yet more work is clearly required if we as a people are to hold true to our most universal pledge: *liberty and justice for all*. If we are the land of the free and home of the brave, we must do more than just state this. We must *act* in accordance to it. I urge the state legislature to set an example to the citizens of Connecticut and to our fellow states in this country of ours that here all persons are equally free, equally protected, equally valued, and most importantly, equally respected. For if there are some who are not then we are not the land of the free and the brave and have no justification for making such a claim. And if we do so make such a claim and continue to neglect the rights and freedoms of our own, we should be shamed for making such a claim and bear the disgrace of a profound lie.

I thank you for your considerations,

David "Rachel" Conlin McLeod, a proud transgender citizen of Connecticut.