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Testimony in support of HB 6599, *An Act Concerning Discrimination*
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Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Jennifer Paradis, a resident of Columbia, CT and I am honored and grateful to have this opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination. An Act Concerning Discrimination, if passed, will ensure the livelihood and equality of some of Connecticut's most vulnerable residents by adding gender identity and expression to Connecticut's anti-discrimination statutes.

As an active, life-long resident of Connecticut, I am horrified by the current maltreatment and discrimination faced by the transgender and gender non-conforming community in our state. Growing up in Connecticut and attending a state school for my undergraduate degree, I have experienced first-hand what devastating impacts discrimination can have on an individual. As an executive board member of our LGBT gay-straight alliance, I found myself listening to the stories of hate crimes and discrimination faced daily by our members that often times had to be brought to administration and campus security, however there is one story that will stay with me forever. It is the story of a friend and a peer who is the first person in her family to graduate high school and attend college. In fear of being harassed and assaulted she presented herself as male, the sex she was as assigned at birth, although she has known since birth that her gender identity is female. Having to lie about her true identity is disrespectful and demeaning enough, but her story is far from over. On the second day of school, she walked into her campus apartment to find that the kitchen, bathroom and shower had been covered in fish oil. My friend, deathly allergic to fish oil, had to leave the apartment immediately and seek asylum where she could until maintenance could come and put the room back in order. The most heartbreaking part was learning from her that her roommates were responsible for the act and did so to express their feelings towards having a transgender roommate. The University had no obligation to respond to the incident, as a state school follows state laws which currently do not prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity or gender expression. The resolution of the administration was to have a mediation meeting with my friend and all of her roommates to resolve tensions and to have all parties return to their room. Two weeks later my friend dropped out of school and has not returned. During the course of that semester, university faculty, staff and students banded together to create the Pride Room initiative a functioning safe haven for LGBT students with the mission to educate and advocate our campus on the LGBT community in hopes to prevent future attacks and hate crimes on campus, but our protections must go further than individual campus initiatives. Adding gender identity and expression to Connecticut's Anti-Discrimination laws will prevent unfortunate and unfair situations such as this one. It gives notice to employers, landlords, lenders, owners of establishments and all institutions following the state's anti-discrimination laws in order to keep discrimination from occurring in the first place protecting the basic human rights of Connecticut residents.

The principle behind adding gender identity and gender expression to Connecticut's non-discrimination laws could not be clearer. These are our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors and love ones who are targets of discrimination in many areas of their lives and this marginalization exposes them to social and economic insecurity. The fact is protecting these citizens through our anti-discrimination laws is a no-cost way to close a gap in our state's non-discrimination statues ensuring that all hardworking people have the chance to earn a living and provide for themselves and their families.

All Connecticut residents deserve fairness and equality. Passage of HB 6599 will ensure that all people are clearly and uniformly protected from discrimination regardless of their gender identity or expression. Simply put, it is the right thing to do. I thank you for your time and I urge you to support this bill.