



**Leif Mitchell's Testimony before the Judiciary Committee, March 21, 2012  
Hearing on HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination**

Good morning Chairperson Coleman, Chairperson Fox, and members of the Committee, we thank you for your leadership on prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. My name is Leif Mitchell and I am a Co-Chair at GLSEN Connecticut, a Chapter of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). For 20 years, GLSEN has worked to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

**The passage of HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination is critical to ensure the safety and well-being of Connecticut's students.** Bullying and harassment has become a serious public health crisis in our nation's schools. Sixty-five percent of teens have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted based on a characteristic that makes them different from some of their peers, like their race, religion, or gender. Sixty-five percent of junior high school teachers report that bullying and harassment is a serious problem in their school.<sup>1</sup>

Bullying and harassment has often increased adverse effects on marginalized students, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. According to GLSEN's 2009 National School Climate Survey,<sup>2</sup> nearly nine out of ten LGBT students experience verbal or physical harassment in school. Thirty percent missed *at least* one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. LGBT students who were frequently harassed had grades on average a half a grade lower than their peers and were less likely to want to pursue college. Though these statistics reflect the experiences of LGBT students, consequences like absenteeism, lowered educational aspirations and academic achievement, and poorer psychological well-being can affect all students who experience bullying and harassment.

**In order to improve the lives and ability to learn of all Connecticut students, we support passage of HB 6599 which will ensure that "gender identity/expression" is added to all Connecticut statutes addressing discrimination, including those statutes related to schools.**

A report issued by GLSEN in 2009, *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools*, suggests a significant number of transgender students' education has suffered due to the lack of protection that a statutory amendment could provide.

- Two-thirds of Connecticut transgender students feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and how they express their gender.
- Almost half of all transgender students report skipping a class at least once in the past month and missing at least one day of school in the previous month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Connecticut has the opportunity to become one of the growing number of states and municipalities that have extended full civil rights to all residents—including transgender residents. Please pass HB 6599 and make Connecticut a safer place for all people who identify as transgender or who express their gender in non-conforming ways. Our students need your support!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [LeifMitchell@hotmail.com](mailto:LeifMitchell@hotmail.com). Thank you for your time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN.

<sup>2</sup> Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Diaz, E. M., and Bartkiewicz, M. J. (2010). *The 2009 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.