

Testimony of Marichris Cariaga
In Support of HB 6599: *An Act Concerning Discrimination*
March 21, 2011

Senator _____, Representative _____, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Marichris Cariaga and I am a sophomore nursing major at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT, a native of Norwich, CT, and a campus action intern for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. I am testifying in support of HB 6599: *An Act Concerning Discrimination* as an addition to Connecticut's non-discrimination law which will ensure that the fundamental opportunities to life are accessible to all Connecticut residents, regardless of gender identity and expression.

As an ally of the LGBT community, I have heard multiple personal stories from trans-folk who have faced explicit acts of discrimination in the workplace and in accessing housing, harassment at school, and even concerns of discrimination and/or harassment in a healthcare setting. The lack of policy specifically targeting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression allows for the perpetuation of discrimination toward Connecticut residents who are transgendered, transsexual, genderqueer, and all other persons who do not "fit" into society's constructed gender binary. Thus, trans-folk hesitate to apply for jobs or housing, attend school, access healthcare, and avoid many other basic opportunities from fear of being discriminated against or harassed. This bias has resulted in economic insecurity, marginalization, and lack of appropriate representation and/or adequate aid to a population of some of the most outstanding, well-abled persons.

Currently, 13 states, Washington, DC, and over 130 municipalities have laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity or gender expression¹. It is time that Connecticut joins this overdue progressive movement of policies. As a young and somewhat impressionable voter in the state of Connecticut, I have faith that the officials I vote for will support bills that affirm the protection, rights, and liberties of all of Connecticut's citizens, regardless of creed, nationality, race, sexuality, sex, gender identity/expression, or any other integral part of an individual that makes that person an *individual*. I firmly believe that it is my officials' responsibility to provide fundamental sanctions for the citizens that they are elected to represent.

By not supporting HB 6599: *An Act Concerning Discrimination*, not only does this ensure that certain citizens of Connecticut are oppressed of their basic rights to opportunity (which is the complete converse of what laws *should* enact), but it is a deliberate act of exclusion toward an already marginalized and seemingly invisible population of *human beings* who are struggling for the mere right to be recognized and treated as such. It is further the neglect of those with positions of power to effectively practice what they were originally elected to do: represent and ensure that the needs and rights of *all* of their citizens are acknowledged and met. I have faith in my legislators in that they make powerful, substantially life-changing decisions on the basis of what is not only morally right, but on the benefits that will come from their decisions and that their decision making is a direct response to the appeals of the citizens that they care about and represent.

You are our voice. Please vote "yes" on HB 6599: *An Act Concerning Discrimination* and end the silence. Thank you.

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¹ <http://www.ctequality.com/storage/ctEQ%20one%20pager%202-22-11.pdf>