

Rev. Aaron L. Miller
Metropolitan Community Church of New Haven, New Haven CT
Testimony in Support of HB 6599, "An Act Concerning Discrimination"

I am the Rev. Aaron Miller, Associate Minister for Pastoral Care at the Metropolitan Community Church in New Haven, CT. I am deeply grateful to have the opportunity today to submit testimony in support of HB 6599. Adding Gender Identity and Gender Expression to existing Connecticut nondiscrimination laws will ensure equal opportunity and protection are made available to all Connecticut residents, including some of our most vulnerable. What seems like five simple words (Gender Identity and Gender Expression) simply carries the power to change the lives and hopes of those who are gender nonconforming.

I am transgender clergy and therefore know personally the challenges that face the gender nonconforming community. I have lived a life contrary to my nature to conform to societal expectations, based upon physical attributes. I know the bravery it takes to make a decision to live authentically as the "who" that I am, risking the loss of family and friends...those from whom we need the most love and support. And (before called to the ministry), I faced the deep fear that I would lose my 18 year position as a senior manager with a quarter billion dollar New Haven global manufacturing company. That day, I walked into the HR department and made the declaration that I was planning to transition. Knowing there were no Connecticut laws to protect my job, I placed my income, career, home, and family at-risk in that one simple moment, when I claimed my life as my own. The company did not have Gender Identity and Gender Expression protection in its employment policy. I was lucky. The company added this protection and supported me through transition; but, the greater point is that we cannot leave fairness, equal opportunity, and legal protection arbitrarily in the hands of our employers. This is not a private matter that can be left to subjectivity and the personal discretion of a select few. Connecticut is known for its fair and equitable laws and protections and so I ask our Connecticut legislators to do the 'right thing' by adding Gender Identity and Gender Expression to existing Connecticut discrimination protections.

As clergy, I now provide pastoral care to those who consider suicide a solution to the hopelessness they face in the form of transgender-related unemployment, underemployment, homelessness, credit denial, and inaccessible public accommodations. Equality is a value that we, as people of faith, hold as a core belief. So, let us stand together on this issue and affirm the inherent respect and dignity that should be afforded to all people. Simply...adding this protection to the existing nondiscrimination laws in Connecticut is the good and right thing to do. As history has proven, civil rights can never be placed in the hands of the common people. Government is *of and for the people...all* people. Ultimately, we will be judged – not by how much or how many succeeded; but rather by how we ensured the most vulnerable among us were given a chance.

Thank you for considering and passing this very important bill. These five words can open a world of possibilities...let us again show leadership by standing firm against discrimination in the fair state of Connecticut. It truly is a simple matter.

With gratitude for your time and consideration,

The Rev. Aaron Miller