

Rev. Sarah Person
Universalist Church of West Hartford, CT
Testimony in Support of
The Transgender Civil Rights bill, HB 6599, "An Act Concerning Discrimination"
March 21, 2011

I am the Rev. Sarah Person, Associate Minister for the Universalist Church of West Hartford. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of HB 6599. This small addition to existing legislation, affecting an admittedly small percentage of the population, will have a huge impact on their lives and the lives of those of us who know them, love them and work with them. Transgender individuals, like all of us, have family, friends, allies, teachers, employers and colleagues, health care practitioners, and clergy who they depend upon and who depend upon them for support. When a transgender person is denied employment, a safe workplace, education, health care and housing, it affects not only them but all the people around them.

I know transgender children who are afraid they will be unsafe in their homes, their schools and their churches. I have known adults who are worried they will lose their jobs, who have been exposed to brutality, and who struggle daily with the stress this brings. This has a profound effect on their families and colleagues. This is not an issue of non-conformity or illness; it is an issue of identity. The children I know have dealt with this awareness of their transgender nature since they were small. Rather than being a youthful whim, it is a deep and abiding recognition of the essence of one's maleness or femaleness that extends over years. How a person presents one's gender to society in dress, behavior, appearance and mannerisms is a form of gender expression. Gender identity and gender expression have no relationship to maturity, intelligence, emotional state, or integrity. Transgender individuals are as mature, intelligent, adjusted and moral as those who are not trans. The fact that they often are not seen as such, and treated badly for it, requires that we offer them protection.

Even with our anti-discrimination laws in effect in Connecticut, transgender individuals are disproportionately more likely to be targets of severe harassment and discrimination in the workplace, in schools, health facilities and accommodations. The consequences can be horrendous; leading to higher rates of depression and suicide and homelessness. Our faith community, as well as many others, has long sought to amend this injustice. We value the integrity and worth of each and every one of us. We are asking Connecticut to join 13 other states and Washington, DC, and over 110 cities and towns that have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity or gender expression. Your support of this legislation will be fair, will be compassionate and will be right.