

Jerimarie Liesegang, PhD; Director Ct TransAdvocacy Coalition

I would like to thank the distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me to speak in unequivocal support of HB 6599, An Act Concerning Discrimination. My name is Jerimarie Liesegang and I am Director of the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition. I am here to speak both on behalf of the Ct TransAdvocacy Coalition as well as a Transsexual Woman who has faced significant discrimination within the State of Connecticut.

I founded the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition many years back as a result of the severe discrimination against, and minimal visibility of, the Transgender community. In Connecticut my organization routinely receives calls from transgender people in distress of having just lost their job or not able to secure employment because of they are transgender. Just over the last two weeks, I was contacted by a trans person who was concerned that since she just transitioned her State pension and medical coverage would be in jeopardy; I was also contacted by a case worker called me trying to locate a transitional housing facility (most likely a homeless shelter) that would not discriminate against her transsexual client and finally I was contacted by a transsexual person who was being harassed at their place of employment and the employer was not stopping it. A recent Greater Hartford survey we did supports the national statistics that 50% of transgender persons experience employment discrimination, and for the remaining minority fortunate enough to be employed, most realize annual salaries of less than \$15,000; that housing discrimination exceeds 40% and that nearly 50% lack any type of health insurance. These statistics truly represent the extent of the discrimination that trans people in Connecticut face every single day! And sadly it is highly unlikely many will be able to testify here today simply because they are struggling to find shelter and food to exist, let alone secure transportation for a day of testifying at the Capitol.

Personally you have heard my story in prior testimony of discrimination. I had a thriving business in Ct that employed up to 12 technical programmers and sadly when I transitioned I lost all my contracts due to discrimination and had to shutter my business. Though I searched for a new job, it took me over three years to find an employer that would look beyond my being a transsexual and recognize that I could be of value to them. I also lost my family and in a divorce any custodial access to my children. I lost so very much in my life simply because I am a transsexual, yet I also learned about true friends and people who did not judge me simply upon a stereotype or vicious statements by bigots but rather took the time to see that I am an intelligent and warm human being.

I will also say that there is light in all this misery. The company that finally did hire me realized the value that a trans person can be to a Corporation and two years ago modified their EEO policies to include Gender Identity. The City of Hartford, which has experienced several Transgender employment discrimination lawsuits', passed an ordinance in January of this year that included Gender Identity or Expression in its anti-discrimination policies. DCF modified its policies to not discriminate against Transgender people. Transsexual parents are not treated as "sick" people any longer within our divorce and child custody courts. Numerous companies, churches, universities and colleges modified their EEO policies to include Gender Identity or Expression.

Sadly however, we are still here each year asking the State of Connecticut to align its non-discrimination laws with the many major and small businesses in Connecticut, the many human services organizations, Churches and citizens of Connecticut who have already said that it is **WRONG** to discriminate against any person and specifically Transgender people! I urge you all to hear my story, the story of all those who testify today or have submitted written testimony in support this legislation; and to support the Transgender Community in being productive, useful and contributory citizens of this wonderful state! This legislation is not about Special Rights; it is about **basic Human Rights!**

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