

Tara Alexander

Testimony to the Judiciary Committee in support of

HB 6599, *An Act Concerning Discrimination*

March 21, 2011

My name is Tara Alexander, I am a resident of Bozrah, and I am a transsexual woman. I thank you for taking the time to read this testimony in support of HB 6599, which seeks to add *gender identity or expression* to Connecticut's anti-discrimination law in the areas of employment, housing, credit, and public accommodations. This small change will make a huge difference for all of our state by reaffirming the value that all residents of the State of Connecticut should be free from discrimination.

As a transsexual, I spent 30 years of my life living with a secret. What the world saw when it looked at me was not reflective of who I knew I was. As a child, I was treated as an outsider, harassed and bullied at school, and the fear of what treatment lay in store for me if my tormenters were to learn of my gender dysphoria kept me from sharing my secret. As an adult, having earned a college degree, found employment, and bought a home in Connecticut, the fear of losing my job and ending up homeless kept me from living an authentic life. At a certain point living a false life, living a lie, got to be too painful and depressing and I was confronted with the realization that many people like myself face; if I am going to continue living I have to be true to myself and live an honest life. I took the biggest gamble of my life and began my transition. My friends and family were very supportive, but their biggest fear for me was whether I'd face discrimination as a result of my transition. I didn't wake up one morning and decide to change my gender. I did wake up one morning and decide to stop living in fear of retribution, stop living a false life, stop hiding from the world and decided to start down the road to living authentically.

No resident of our state should have to fear losing her job, being denied a place to live, or being asked to leave restaurants, stores, or medical facilities because of her gender identity or expression. As a state, we must protect the civil rights and individual liberties of all of Connecticut's residents as a matter of principle. HB 6599 will provide an explicit, uniform protection and affirm our state's value of equal treatment of all its citizens. This addition to our state's non-discrimination law would signal to me and others like me, as well as our families and friends, that Connecticut is a place I can live, work, and raise a family without fear of discrimination that can too easily and too often lead to unemployment and homelessness.

HB 6599 does not just protect transgender and gender non-conforming people. Every person has a gender identity and a gender expression. For most people their gender identity aligns very well with their sex, and they are comfortable expressing their gender in ways that conform to societal norms for their assigned birth sex. For some people, their gender identity may conform to their assigned sex at birth, but they need to express themselves in ways that transgress societal norms for their assigned sex at birth. Take for example a person labeled female at birth, whose internal sense of self is also female, but who dresses, walks, wears her hair, etc in a typically male fashion.

These "tomboys" are tolerated as children, but tend to be shunned as adults because they are not feminine enough. Similarly, a man, labeled as male at birth and having a male gender identity, may exhibit effeminate behavior or speech patterns and because he's not acting "manly" enough, face discrimination. These examples, unlike me, represent people for whom any form of transition is not desired but who may be fired or asked to leave an establishment, if a boss or manager doesn't think they look, talk, dress, etc. in a way that conforms to his stereotype for male or female.

I support HB 6599 and I ask this committee and the General Assembly to support HB 6599 as well. No one should have to live in fear of unfair treatment as a result of their decision to stop hiding and to live an authentic life. All hardworking people in Connecticut, including transsexuals and transgender and gender non-conforming people, should have the chance to earn a living and provide for themselves and their families.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and I hope you can support this bill.

Tara Alexander
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