

Good afternoon.

My name is Dr. Richard Stillson. I am a licensed psychologist practicing in Hartford, CT and residing in Hartford, too. I come before you in opposition to the H.B. No. 5193 An Act Concerning Health Insurance Coverage for Gender Reassignment Surgery.

My work with transgender people has spanned over 15 years and at this point, I work exclusively with this population. The transition process is an arduous process. It begins with self-awareness and that can be accompanied by repulsion for one's biological anatomy. Many engage in their own self-surgery through self-mutilation as a means to correct what is dissonant with their gender identity. This has lead for some to additional complications and challenges in healing.

The emotional scars are even harder to heal. Shame and self-loathing are part of the emotional baggage that transgender people need to work through. Their view of themselves as different from everyone else is another challenge to their coming out process. Society has not fully embraced these challenges for transgender people and oppression, ridicule, violence and discrimination are what accompany the process for many in transition.

When all of this feels insurmountable, many resort to substance use and/or suicide as a way out of an alien body and

existence which feels irreparable. Substance use helps to numb the emotional pain and assists in forgetting temporarily all that transgender people are living. Often though, transgender people feel the only way out of this dysphoria is to end their lives and without hope many choose to commit suicide.

Since last year when the insurance provisions for this process were extended, I saw the installation of hope in the lives of transgender people. The costs of these procedures when paid out of pocket are prohibitive. Many didn't have the opportunity for surgery because it was seen as cosmetic or elective surgery. I contend this surgery is not cosmetic or elective, but rather reparative and vital to transgender people living fully in their bodies. It is vital to their mental health and contributes to assisting transgender people in having lives worth living in the bodies they have always felt were their identity.

Thank you for your time today in considering my testimony in your deliberations on this bill.

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