

Testimony Requesting Bill No 5553 be Amended to Help Homeless Students

3/1/16

Hi, my name is Natalie Garcia and I'm 24 years old. I want to talk to you about the issue of youth homelessness and how it impacts the children and youth in our communities, particularly LGBT youth.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself.

My parents used to call me disgusting. My parents told me that god hated me. My parents told me to give up on being myself because everyone will hate me.

It's never easy growing up being transgender. I had been depressed from a very early age and I constantly heard hateful things, primarily from my parents. I was afraid to be myself. Just---the basic freedom of being honest about myself. The basic freedom to express myself however made me feel most comfortable.

I felt like a rat in a cage. If I couldn't trust my parents, how could I trust anyone else? My depression and anxiety began to overwhelm me and I spent years thinking about killing myself. I tried killing myself. I was too depressed to take care of myself. I couldn't do my homework, and most days I was too depressed to go to my classes at school. I couldn't take care of myself or be a good student, so how would I ever survive out in the real world?

I thought my problems at home were just my own issue that I had to deal with or put up with. I didn't consider ever getting help until it was handed to me after my suicide attempt.

But then I heard about The Connection, an organization that provided stable housing and case management to youth in need. My therapists kept telling me that I had to move out, and told me to find supportive housing. I thought to myself, that's for people that really need it. I don't need it, my housing is fine and nothing can really help fix me.

Getting into supportive housing has been the most important thing that's happened to me. I finally had a place where I felt safe and welcome. I found "home," and it's helped me become the person I am right here. I am no longer afraid of being myself, and I have been growing because of it. I'm now working full-time as a research assistant at the Institute for Community Research working on research projects focused on youth homelessness.

Please invest in the wellbeing of our youth so that what happened to me doesn't happen to any more kids. So that kids won't be chronically absent, that they will have a safe and more stable schooling environment, and that they can learn to trust their schools and establish a positive relationship with their schools that will allow youth to bring their issues and their concerns with school staff. So that they can trust and develop a relationship with adults that are supposed to be role models and have a strong impact in their lives. I ask you to amend bill No 5553 to include language that ensures identification and education for homeless students.