

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 6540**  
**AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF HIV**

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February 24, 2019

To the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

I am submitting the following testimony in support of H.B. 6540, *An Act Concerning the Prevention of HIV*. I am an advocate for immigrant rights with Unidad Latina en Acción and a community member based in New Haven, Connecticut. I am also a proud gay man who takes Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) every day as a preventive measure to minimize the risk of HIV infection.

Coming to terms with my sexuality was a complicated and hurtful process, full of uncertainty, misinformation, and leading to situations where my well-being was put in jeopardy in more than one way. I came to the United States in August of 2010, as a confused fifteen year old who struggled to come to terms with his sexual orientation and fought it every chance he could. I found myself struggling, trying to fit in to a culture that was not mine. I found myself trying to navigate a new school, a new city, a new life. That uncertainty made me vulnerable to people who, in retrospective, took advantage of my emotional situation. Combined with a lack of sexual education that was very much needed in my high school, I engaged multiple times in sexual relationships with other men without the adequate protection.

As time moved forward, I found the strength to admit to myself and others that I was gay. February 27 marks the 6th year anniversary of me coming out. It also marks the day in which my family began to break apart. We all know too well the cliché story of the gay kid rejected by one or both parents. Cliches come to exist for a reason - and it is because there is some truth to them. I grew up in a catholic Mexican household. I grew up listening to things like “maricon”, “puto” and other slurs being used to hurt, humiliate and dehumanize people like me. I grew up in a household where talking about sex was a taboo. Naturally, when I came out as gay, things were never the same. My household became a toxic environment, it became unsafe. I recall one night having to call a friend in the middle of the night, asking him to pick me up a few blocks away from my house, with a bloody shirt and no shoes, after an argument escalated into a physical fight with my father. To this day, my relationship with my father is non-existent.

This bill brings some protection to some of our most vulnerable youth. Youth who are already at a disadvantage. HIV has been an issue that has affected the LGBTQ community the greatest since the very beginning. Today, brown and black youth are at greater risk of infection. While being infected with HIV is no longer a death sentence, treatment is very costly and lifelong. We are living in a society where people who need constant medication to survive are dying every day because they can't access it - and for that reason prevention is key. Allowing minors to access PrEP can prevent youth to have more tools available to them when looking out for their health and their wellbeing.

I was lucky I never caught an STI from my partners. I see how dangerous it was, not only to me but anyone I slept with afterwards. Had PrEP been available to me when I was in high school, I still would have not been able to access it - as I couldn't count with the support of my parents. And while that is a much bigger issue to tackle, in terms of LGBTQ acceptance in our society, we can potentially save our youth's lives. Right here, and right now.

I strongly support H.B. 6540, and I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of this bill, knowing that if this can save at least one life, it is worth it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jesus A. Morales Sanchez