

Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, and honorable members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Kayla Iannetta and I am a teacher, LGBTQ+ advocate and activist with two CT based nonprofits, and a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I am here today in support of Senate Joint Resolution 35, which proposes a state constitutional amendment concerning discrimination on the basis of sex under the Equal Protection Clause. This resolution is incredibly important to so many people in the state of CT. CT has a long standing history of being one of the safer states for LGBTQ+ people. In my position as a teacher, I have the honor and privilege of advising several student groups surrounding LGBTQ+ student interests and working with administration on equitable policies. In my role as an advocate and activist, I have the privilege and honor of attending events and fighting alongside other amazing individuals to increase LGBTQ+ visibility and safety in our state. And as an LGBTQ+ person myself, I had the privilege of growing up in this state, and benefited from the safety it has afforded me up until this point. I can tell you from being a part of all of these spaces that queer people are terrified right now. We see attack after attack on our communities day after day that are increasing our anxieties, making us scared for our families, and scared that leaving our safe spaces could cost us our lives. Since LGBTQ+ history is not mandated in our schools, I would like to paint a brief picture of what my community endured not even 60 years ago when we had no protection against discrimination. LGBTQ+ people could be removed from jobs and housing without notice for being themselves. Having and planning families was near impossible. They suffered from extremely high incidence of homelessness and mental health issues, which are both still huge issues for the community. We were often left to live and congregate together in terrible conditions, living in community and becoming each other's chosen families. We faced violence and discrimination in any and all spaces because of misinformation and individual opinions that people weaponized to keep us oppressed and disadvantaged. Let me be clear, these phenomena are still occurring and now unfortunately seeing a rise in frequency in the last few years, but the LGBTQ+ community has fought tirelessly throughout our country's history, and most notably, since the start of our liberation movement in 1969 to steadily fight the discrimination and violence against our community. We have chipped away at injustice after injustice to earn our civil rights that we should have always had. Today, my picture of the past, while watered down for time purposes, probably still seems distant and unrealistic. But I can assure you, with the now rising numbers of violent offenses and discriminatory acts against us and the flood of executive orders and proposed anti-LGBTQ+ bills across our country, your LGBTQ+ friends and neighbors are having conversations about the times before nondiscrimination policies were put in place because we fear it might soon regress to those extremes, or worse. Some of your LGBTQ+ friends and neighbors are having conversations about how not to lose medical rights or custody of their kids. They may be discussing how to hide in plain sight to avoid discrimination and potential violence. They may be discussing how to keep their queer children alive and give them necessary access to medical care no matter the cost. They are worried their marriages might one day be illegitimate. My students and so many other young queer people are having discussions about hiding to protect themselves from violence and bullying. Your LGBTQ+ friends and family may even be having discussions about fleeing the country and seeking asylum for their families. I can assure you that these conversations are not light ones and are out of desperation because we as a

community are preparing for the worst. I support SJ35 because amending our state constitution to include the language found in the proposed document would not only follow CT's history of supporting LGBTQ+ rights, but would ease the minds of many terrified people who are living in constant daydreams of the worst case scenarios. CT has a chance to make a strong statement and be loud and clear that we as a state are dedicated to equal rights for everyone, especially our most marginalized.