

I would like to thank the distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me to speak in unequivocal support of HB 5723, An Act Concerning Discrimination. My name is Jerimarie Liesegang and I am Director of the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition. I am here to speak both on behalf of the Ct TransAdvocacy Coalition as well as a Transsexual Woman who has faced significant discrimination.

I founded the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition many years back as a result of the severe discrimination against, and minimal visibility of, the Transgender community. This organization has grown dramatically over the years and works extensively with Service Providers, Case Workers, legislative initiatives as well as one on one Advocacy with the Transgender community.

Discrimination takes many forms in our society, be it loss of employment, homelessness, denial of credit and health care/coverage to name but a few. Probably one of the worse forms of discrimination comes in the form of violence where discrimination becomes a means to justify hate and oppression. Sadly we only need to reflect on several recent murders (i) A transgender women was murdered in Detroit on February 4th (ii) Nesha Stewart, a transgender sex worker was stabbed to death in the Bronx on February 10th (iii) Lawrence King a 15 year old gender non-conforming youth who wore makeup and was feminine was murdered by a class mate in California. Three brutal murders due to their Gender Identity or Expression and all within just two weeks! It should also be noted that due to the severe discrimination against transgender people, sex work is sometimes the only option to providing food and housing. Unfortunately, sex work also puts many transgender peoples lives at risk as in the Detroit and Bronx murders.

Sadly and on far too frequent a basis, we receive calls from Transgender people who are being discriminated against: be it in Employment, Housing or by Service Providers. From both a priori and empirical studies, it is well known that discrimination against Transgender people is rampant. That over 50% of transgender persons experience employment discrimination, and for the remaining minority fortunate enough to be employed, most realize annual salaries of less than \$15,000; that housing discrimination based on their gender identity or expression exceeds 40%; that nearly 50% lack any type of health insurance and over 40% are never able to finish high school due to discrimination ~ and this list sadly goes on.

Sadly these alarming discrimination statistics against people who do not fit the societal norms of male and female reflect an all too common view that these are people who are not worthy of the basic human rights many of us take for granted and that even their lives are disposable.

In Connecticut my organization routinely receives calls from transgender people in distress of having just lost their job or not able to gain employment because of they are transgender. Just a few weeks ago I worked with two case managers who could not find a homeless shelter that would take Transsexuals and another who was severely harassed by other clients and the director said there was nothing he could do!

At the same time my organization recognizes that passage of such legislation alone won't eliminate transgender discrimination. That education is equally important. And such

education is something my organization does constantly with many of the statewide service providers, organizations and institutions. We have consistently found that this education goes a long way to removing the myths and misconceptions many individuals have about transgender. They realize that being Transgender is NOT a choice though rather is a natural consequence of the diversity of sex and gender. Deciding to have an in ground pool is a choice ~ being Transgender is NOT. Who would choose to loose nearly everything in their life so as to live as they were truly born to be? Certainly for me I did not choose to loose everything in my life to be legally recognized as a woman. This is a path I had to follow, like so many internal survival instincts we as human beings have. Society forced this loss directly upon me once I "transitioned" ~ and I will not go back into the closet for anyone, no matter how difficult they try to make my life. I have a human and basic right to exist, to live, to be employed, to have housing, to be a parent and to be a productive citizen in this beautiful and wonderful state of Connecticut.

I urge you all to hear my story, the story of all those who testify today or have submitted written testimony albeit anonymous in support this legislation; and to support the Transgender Community in being productive, useful and contributory citizens of this wonderful state! This legislation is not about Special Rights; it is about basic Human Rights!

Sincerely,
Jerimarie Liesegang, PhD
Director, Ct TransAdvocacy Coalition