

Testimony in Opposition to HB1564-FN

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I see protections in the area of housing - crossed out, in the area of employment - crossed out, in health care - crossed out, in crime reporting, home care, foster care, education, real estate transactions, public accommodations, insurance, civil rights, hate crimes - even in cable tv installation - all crossed out. In every area of our civil life, this bill crosses out the legal protections of our NH neighbors on the basis of being transgender, non-binary or intersex. This bill says that although we protect people of all kinds from discrimination, not them. It's as if they suddenly do not exist.

But I know personally that they exist, because in 2017, when I worked hard to get HB 1319 passed here in NH to ensure these legal protections on the basis of gender identity were in place, I had just lost my exceptional middle child to suicide at age 18. My child had been a talented student who won a full scholarship to an exclusive boarding school, was a scholar of linguistics, physics and music, the class president all four years, a crew team member, dorm leader, beloved camp counselor. My child, who'd been raised as a son, came out as transgender in October of her senior year of high school, no longer able to secretly suffer from the pain of gender dysphoria. Despite getting support from us, her church, her friends and school, the prevailing winds of politics in 2016 made the stigma of being a person with a different gender identity so difficult that she couldn't reconcile her own reality with her successful life thus far. Just a few months later she had died by suicide, before ever having had the opportunity to get any kind of treatment or help for her crushing gender dysphoria.

People with gender dysphoria are different than most people, but they absolutely exist. They may not, however, always look like whatever stereotype is in your mind. All transgender youth need support for the situation they find themselves born into, and they need compassionate medical care, and legal protections from harassment and discrimination. Especially now as they are being targeted in so many legislations like this one.

I also know people who are intersex. They are born with unusual chromosomes and different combinations of reproductive organs from both genders. Their very bodies make a lie of the current trend to define gender as only either male or female. While intersex people are rare, they do exist. I know them. They, too, need support and compassionate medical care and legal protections from harassment and discrimination. Especially now, as they are being targeted in so many legislations like this one.

Bullying and worse has long been commonplace for this small group. But now it's not just the school yard bullies they need to worry about but their own legislators proposing bills that remove their legal rights and deny their existence as being worthy of protections. It is not easy to grow up this way. And here we are today considering a bill that simply crosses them out in every area of our common life. Is it no wonder that transgender and intersex young people have a stunningly high suicide rate - a rate that would get far more attention if it were in any other group. Sadly, I learned this dreadful statistic too late, having been over confident that my confident and capable daughter would be able to work it all out and handle it in time. I was wrong.

How many other parents will go through this kind of loss? How many other youths with gender diversity will consider or succeed in killing themselves? Today you have the ability to support these vulnerable neighbors instead of targeting them.

I've come here today to remind you that doing so is a matter of life and death to gender diverse youth and adults. I speak out of my motherly grief and love for my lost child and from the foundation of my faith, which teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to treat every human being with dignity and respect.

Please do not make yourselves accountable for this un-American impulse to remove the legal rights of a small minority from their protections under the law. Please do not open our state up to the law suits that will surely follow such a shocking removal of civil rights. And please do not add yet another burden to even one more shining star of a teenager in New Hampshire who is not sure they'll ever be able to fit in.

I pray for them and I pray for wisdom and compassion for you, our legislators in the face of this hurtful initiative. I strongly urge you to defeat this bill.