



Testimony for the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA) Legislative Hearing

From the Empire State Pride Agenda

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My name is Christopher Argyros, I'm the Transgender Rights Organizer with the Empire State Pride Agenda. Thank you, Assemblymember Gottfried and Senator Squadron and your staff, for providing this opportunity to discuss the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA) (A5039/S6349.)

The Empire State Pride Agenda is New York's statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) advocacy organization. Founded in 1990, the Pride Agenda seeks to advance equality and justice for LGBT New Yorkers and our families.

We believe it should go without saying that every New Yorker should be treated fairly and equally by the laws of our state. It should go without saying that all hardworking people in our State, including transgender New Yorkers, should have the chance to earn a living and provide for ourselves and our families. It should go without saying that nobody should have to live in fear that they can be legally fired for reasons that have nothing to do with their job performance. But here we are, in 2012, having to say it; fighting for basic equal protections that the rest of New Yorkers enjoy. New York desperately needs a statewide transgender non-discrimination law. The time to pass this legislation is now.

Why GENDA?

We hear every week from people across New York State who are being harassed at work, or have lost their job, been refused service in a restaurant or store, even been evicted from their homes, simply because they are transgender. The Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA) would explicitly extend basic civil rights protections to people based on their gender expression or identity.

Due to discrimination, many transgender New Yorkers cannot find adequate employment or housing. Like many, our troubles are compounded by these tough economic times. With one out of every three transgender New Yorkers having been homeless at one time, two out of every three experiencing discrimination at work, and nearly 30 percent having faced a serious physical or sexual assault, this is a life or death issue that our state cannot and should not ignore.

Patchwork of Protections

Sixteen states and the District of Columbia have already passed similar non-discrimination laws—and implemented them successfully. More than 125 localities across America, including cities and counties right here in New York State, have passed transgender-inclusive non-discrimination laws. Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Ithaca, New York City and Rochester, along with Westchester, Suffolk and Tompkins Counties have taken the lead. In fact 58.5% of New Yorkers now live in municipalities that have transgender non-discrimination ordinances.

GENDA would fix this current confusing patchwork of local laws and ensure that all transgender New Yorkers are protected. Today, if you are a transgender person living in Suffolk County and working in Nassau County, you are protected from discrimination in housing, but not in employment. These inconsistencies are illogical, but more importantly, they are simply unfair. No resident of this state should fear being on the wrong side of the county line when it comes to providing for themselves and their families.

Support

As a matter of practicality, support for GENDA among New Yorkers is strong and cuts across a broad swath of our state:

- 78% of New Yorkers – nearly four out of five – are in favor of a transgender civil rights bill, according to recent polling.
- More than 500 faith leaders and labor unions representing over 2 million hardworking New Yorkers have stood up for the transgender non-discrimination bill and are firmly in support of extending these protections equally and fairly across the state.
- The private sector is leading the way and 43% of Fortune 500 companies have adopted their own policies to protect employees from transgender discrimination, including New York-based corporations such as Alcoa, American Express, Bausch & Lomb, Citigroup, Corning Inc., Eastman Kodak, Goldman Sachs, IBM, J.P. Morgan Chase, Keyspan, MetLife, The New York Times, PepsiCo, Xerox and Pfizer.

Dedicated Campaign

The Empire State Pride Agenda is working to achieve transgender equality and justice. A statewide transgender non-discrimination law is our top legislative priority, and we have been working on passing this important legislation for many years. Along with our numerous partners and fierce activists, we will continue to use every advocacy tool available until all New Yorkers have equality under the law.

Through our education, organizing and advocacy, the Pride Agenda is broadening our diverse coalition of LGBT people and our allies in government, communities of faith, labor,

all sectors of the workforce and other social justice movements to achieve equality and justice for transgender New Yorkers.

We're going to keep pushing and advocating for a transgender non-discrimination law until it becomes a reality. GENDA is our number one legislative priority and we're going to work across the state to bring the voices of the people, the voices of that 78% that support this legislation, to their elected officials. The campaign stretches from Niagara to Montauk and you can rest assured that every elected official in the state is going to hear from their constituents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, tens of thousands of transgender New Yorkers, people in our communities, neighbors, friends, co-workers, are vulnerable every day to discrimination. We live with growing insecurities and anxieties every day because without a statewide law, we have limited legal recourse in the face of discrimination.

We, transgender people, often face enormous daily challenges. We need a clear message that discrimination against a transgender person is prohibited, is immoral, and is against the values of our state. We need a statewide law that *explicitly* protects people on the basis of gender identity and expression.

I am proud to be a New Yorker, born and raised outside Albany, and I am proud to be transgender. Someday, I hope my state will recognize, respect, and protect all that we transgender people are accomplishing, and all we have to offer by protecting our basic human right to live free from discrimination. I look forward to that day and I look forward to the enactment of GENDA.

Thank you.