



**646 State Street, Albany, NY 12203 ♦ 518-441-3231 ♦ [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org)**

**Forum Testimony on the  
Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act**

**TRANSGENDER CIVIL RIGHTS**

**Robb Smith, Executive Director  
Interfaith Impact of New York State**

Thank you for the opportunity to present a religious approach to transgender rights that is widely held by people of faith and goodwill in New York.

Interfaith Impact of New York State is a statewide coalition of congregations and individuals from Protestant, Reform Jewish, Unitarian Universalist, and other faith traditions working for the common good through progressive religious advocacy.

The transcendent love identified in scripture and philosophy extends to all, and we support the inherent worth and dignity of everyone, including those with gender variant identity and expression. In our congregations across the state, our gender variant members have asked for understanding and welcoming in our houses of worship and for justice and civil rights as citizens of New York.

We have responded by educating ourselves about the issues and deepening our inclusion and affirmation of all those who do not conform to societal norms and expectations around gender. We have taken action, such as using more inclusive language, providing gender-neutral bathrooms, training ministers to provide pastoral care to transgender people and family members, and much more. .

All this requires intentional work on the part of faith communities and access to resources such as those provided on the web by Religion and Faith Program of the Human Rights Campaign, the Transgender 101 program of Unitarian Universalist Association, Empire State Pride Agenda's Transgender Equality and Justice pages, and many other organizations.

Action also means bringing our understanding of God's universal love to the public square as we advocate for the Gender Non-Discrimination Act, which will help ensure that every New Yorker is treated fairly and accorded full rights a citizen.

We believe it is the State's responsibility to ensure that individuals who live in our free society are not unduly prevented from making their own choices, following their own beliefs, and conducting their own lives as they see fit. We believe people should not lose civil rights simply because of physical characteristics that do not fit into convenient categories.

Our democracy is based on pluralism and accommodation of the widest possible range of identities and expression. That requires toleration and broadmindedness, a process we can see at work right now in New York.

Today, a large percentage of New Yorkers live in the nine counties and cities, including New York City and Albany, where transgender rights are protected in housing, employment, restaurants, lodging, medical services, public buildings and other accommodations.

The New York State Legislature recognized the importance of protecting students with gender variant identity and expression when it passed the Dignity for All Students Act. GENDA will ensure that every New Yorker has an equal opportunity to enjoy a full and productive life.

Interfaith Impact of New York State urges the Legislature to take up GENDA in houses and make transgender rights a reality for all New Yorkers in 2013.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY

ROBB SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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