

First, I thank you, Senator Squadron, and you, Assemblyman Gottfried for providing me and others the opportunity to share our concerns.

I speak as the father of my transgender daughter, but also the Co-Transgender Coordinator with my wife Karen for the Kingston chapter of PFLAG, (Parents Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), as a Board member for the Hudson Valley LGBTQ Center, and as a member of PFLAG's National Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Advisory Council. Given those credentials, I ask that the legislature accept that I am in a position to represent not only the interests of my family, but also the interests of all families who work to embrace and protect their gender-nonconforming loved ones.

I have counseled and mentored scores of families that struggle not only with the emotional distress that accompanies gender variance, but also with the social stigma and bigotry that confronts them at every turn. The examples I offer here are from my family's experience, but I assure you that they are not anomalous and are actually tepid in comparison to the treatment that others endure.

I'll share a bit about my family's story then explain specifics about a current concern that has affected our family finances significantly. This is being recorded, so I am testifying today only because my daughter's job is protected by corporate policy.

Karen and I thought that we had two boys, the first of them being scary bright, earning perfect SATs and finishing high school as the valedictorian of a respected boarding school. But once he got to college, problems cropped up, and he would get Fs or As. He had never before gotten anything but an A+, and now he was having trouble finishing course and papers. I remember saying, "What do you mean you can't finish that paper. It's eight pages; you can finish that in 45 minutes. I know who you are!"

After several failed efforts, we finally got a psychologist to provide a diagnosis of depression, which was later changed to bi-polar disorder. In the end, our child was told to leave a well known and highly regarded liberal arts college, dismissed summarily as a pariah. Breaking off an engagement to a woman, he came home and lived right next to us and a few months later came out as gay, which didn't really surprise us.

A few months later, he attended a conference in Westchester called Healing the Hurt, which is now Pride Works. At that conference he attended a session led by a young man who claimed to have graduated from the Masters School in Dobbs Ferry. He sat there wondering how it could be possible, thinking, "But my dad taught there when he would have graduated and the school was all girls." He spoke to this young man after the session and learned that the young man was transgender. Suddenly it came to him in a flash: my son now understood his own identity and realized with relief that he was not the only person on the planet who felt as he did. He came home and announced that he was not gay. I sat there thinking, "Make up your mind!"

Then he said, "I'm transsexual." I knew vaguely what that meant, but had no viable knowledge. Of course, we have had our challenges, and I share the most recent of them, and the pronouns will reflect who my child really is.

Our trans daughter has just turned 34 and has struggled for several years to find viable employment after the national bookstore chain that she worked for went bankrupt.

I offer here two examples of how GENDA can help avoid the discrimination that she has faced.

Approximately two years ago, she interviewed for a position as a Café Manager at a well known bookstore chain. During the interview she was told that her experience as the General Manager of the competing chain made her more suitable for an Assistant Manager position that would soon be posted. Later in that interview, for which she had applied under her female name, it became apparent that she had worked at the competing store under her male name. The Assistant Manager position has now been posted several times, and, despite her credentials, the encouragement that she received, and several attempts to acquire an interview, she received no response. Frustrated, she contacted the manager of the store to ask why she was not being interviewed after being encouraged to apply. She received a terse email that explained she was “not the type of person” that the company wanted to hire.

She now works for an equally well known mobile phone company under her male name, and she dutifully appears at work each day in drag, wearing the proscribed clothing for a male employee. The only thing that protects her if she is outed at work is a corporate policy. It would be quite legal in Newburgh for her employer to fire her solely for being transgender. At present, in addition to the challenges presented by today’s job market, gender-nonconforming citizens of New York must add a separate restriction to their job search. If they want to land a job and keep it, they need to look for a municipality or an employer who will protect their rights since the state refuses to do so.

I ask the legislature to pass GENDA end the persecution.

Again, I thank you for your support and for providing me the opportunity to speak here today.

Rex Butt, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Bronx Community College