



Katrina Harrington

Born biologically male, Katrina Harrington—“Trina” for short—began identifying as female early in middle school, in 1999. Although she began expressing her gender identity in small ways—a little makeup, a more feminine style of dress—her in-school transition sparked a controversy that culminated in a landmark legal decision protecting transgender students’ rights.

When Trina began dressing in a more feminine style at school—an important step in embracing her true gender identity—administrators were quick to discipline her: at first they said her clothing was unacceptable, then began doling out detentions. By eighth grade, Trina daily had to have the principal approve her clothing.

They told her it was “a phase that would pass.”

When it became clear it wasn’t, and that Trina was determined to be true to herself, her family contacted GLAD.

The legal case that followed brought the first reported decision about the right of a transgender student to express her gender identity in school. In *Pat Doe v. Yunits*, GLAD’s Jennifer Levi brought suit against the school department to end Trina’s discriminatory exclusion from school.

The case went to the Massachusetts Superior Court, which found in October 2000 that disciplining Trina for wearing girls’ clothing violated her First Amendment rights of free expression and constituted sex discrimination. An appeals court later upheld the decision.

Trina was free to return to school. But she chose instead to transfer to a local vocational school where she took classes in math, English, and drama. She also was able to develop professional skills in a college-level medical track, taking related classes at a nearby community college.

Now 21, Trina is excited to plan her future. She still lives with her family in Massachusetts, although she dreams of moving to a city in a warmer climate. She also looks forward to continuing her education—something she says may not have been possible without GLAD’s help.

“The case affected my life in a lot of ways,” says Trina. “If I hadn’t gone through it I probably would have dropped out of school. I felt like a lot of stress was lifted off me—like I wasn’t just getting my education based on the way I dressed or the way I looked.”

