HB1319 Testimony of Kenzo Morris

Thank you for allowing me to share my experience and tell you more about me and my family. My name is Kenzo Morris and I am a transgender man. I am also a father, a husband, a runner, a church-goer, a homeowner and a taxpayer, just like many of you in this room. I am here today to respectfully ask for your support for HB 1319 to protect transgender people from discrimination.

My wife, our twin girls and I live in Gilmanton Iron Works. My daughters just turned six and started kindergarten last year. And I am scared for their safety. I’m scared they will be treated differently if someone finds out their father is transgender. I’m afraid of what people might say or do to them in public places like the movie theatre or a restaurant if they realize I’m transgender. Like all parents, I shouldn’t have to live in fear for my children’s wellbeing. I shouldn’t have to be scared that my children will face discrimination just because of who their father is.

Recently, my family and I made the decision to move from a home we had built and lived in for fifteen years after enduring years of harassment and discrimination in our neighborhood. People had broken our mailbox on purpose, snow plows were intentionally plowing us in after huge storms, and we were being intimidated in public places like the beach.

But the discrimination extended much further than our little community. One of the most humiliating experiences happened in 2014 at the DMV in Concord. I went there with all the required paperwork to change my gender on my driver’s license. Instead of helping me, the employee laughed at me, made jokes with coworkers very publicly and loudly, and pointed at my body parts, all while denying my request to change my gender on my license.

Not only was I humiliated, I was treated like I wasn’t even human. That is not how a trip to the DMV should go.

It’s sad to think that our state still allows discrimination. Growing up in central New Hampshire in the late seventies and early eighties as a child of an interracial marriage (my Dad is black and my Mom is white), I felt the sting of discrimination; of people judging you before they get to know you.

I specifically remember my parents talking to a prospective landlord over the phone and getting a new apartment for our family in Franklin, only to have that apartment we’d been told was ours suddenly “no longer available” when the landlord met my parents in person and saw that they were an interracial couple.

I am ashamed, as a lifelong New Hampshire native, to think that over thirty years later, discrimination like this is still allowed in public.

This is why our state needs HB 1319. This bill would protect transgender people like me from discrimination in public places, in employment, and when getting housing. And it would make New Hampshire a safer and welcoming place by showing that transgender people and their families live their lives just like anyone else.

Being transgender is who I am. I cannot change that, just like I cannot change my race. My gender identity should be a protected civil right just like my race already is under NH law. It’s really as simple as that.

This protection is important to families like mine but remember: if one person is chained with the hand of oppression, then none of us are really free.

I respectfully ask that you support equality and non-discrimination and pass this bill.

Thank you.

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