

April 26, 2017 edited on 4/27/2017 to update statistics added at testimony.

Testimony by Brenda Churchill, Bakersfield, Vermont

In support of J.R.S 18 Joint Resolution in support of combating the rise in hate crimes and bigotry.

My name is Brenda Churchill, I am a resident in the town of Bakersfield, Franklin County. I identify as transgender. I have lived in Vermont for over 25 years. I speak to you today as a private citizen, recently retired from 20 years with the phone company.

It is only within the last 3 years that I felt it was finally safe to be my authentic and true self. At 56 years old, I transitioned to living full time as a woman. Why did I wait? Mostly because of my fears of losing family and friends, losing my job and benefits and my losing my home.

Some friends were casualties, but my job remained, and my home is secure. It is not a coincidence. I have been very fortunate that I live in a state that protects my rights as a transgender citizen. Those laws protect all of us but in Vermont, it protects my LGBTQ community especially against hate and bigotry.

On the federal level, the rollbacks of Title IX guidance and the removal of protections for LGBTQ employees of federal contractors point to a trend for the government to let the states follow their lead in changing or eliminating our hard fought protections. As of April 6, 2017, the Human Rights Commission reports 130 bills in 30 states have introduced anti-LGBTQ bills. Cabinet choices have been made and it is clear we have lost representation and standing. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports 1094 bias related incidents in the months following the 2016 election. The rise in hate crimes nationwide indicates that one of the smallest and most misunderstood of the LGBTQ communities is now a target. **That would be me and my transgender sisters and brothers.**

There is no room in Vermont for that kind of fear and hatred that preys upon my transgender brothers and sisters, more so than any other marginalized group. Our hard fought rights are now being decimated by people who just don't want to see anything other than their own prejudiced views as the law of the land. This can not happen here.

We live in one of the top states that have worked for and supported our basic rights as humans beings to exist and thrive. Our legislature supports us with laws that are inclusive to all of us in the LGBTQ community.

For that, I want to thank you all so much. Let us not go backwards on this record. We all need to feel safe and protected by our laws.

Please support this resolution before you today. There is no place for hate and bigotry in Vermont.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.