

February 6, 2020

Testimony before the House Committee on Human Service

H. 611 An act relating to Older Vermonters Act

Thank you all for having me in to testify this morning. When I read this bill for the first time, I thought to myself, huh, I guess I'm an older Vermonter. I have been for a couple of years. I live alone in a very rural part of Franklin County, have a house, a cat, internet that works more often than not, a pension and Social Security check due next Wednesday. I am like thousands of older Vermonters who exist here, retired and comfortable, living the dream.

Except I'm not like most Vermonters and that worries me a bit. I am part of a small population of Vermonters who is transgender. My retirement brought me to the Statehouse, here, to advocate for my transgender family, my whole community of alphabet letters, to make sure we are included in a bill such as we have before us today.

To talk about this bill with you, I spoke to a few people and reviewed what I felt was not included

In the wording of the bill. On the face of this document, it has words that seem to cover all Vermonters over the age of 60. It has definitions, spells out the rights and rules of individuals and agencies that serve the population. I will respectfully submit that the bill, not purposely, or intentionally, does what many bills in the past have done. It fails to name populations within our state that are marginalized, left out, overlooked or forgotten. That is why I am here this morning.

With analysis we found some places that could truly be more inclusive in language and intent. Let me review them with you now.

(will review bill in committee, noting places where we can add this language)

A model for language could be the definitions used in Act 1/H-3 An act relating to ethnic and social equity studies standards for public schools.

(a) Definitions. As used in this act:

(1) "Ethnic groups" means:

(A) non dominant racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including people who are Abenaki, people from other indigenous groups, people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicanx, Latinx, or Middle Eastern descent; and

(B) groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide.

(2) "Social groups" means women and girls, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, and individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, or nonbinary.

Some suggested additions at the places I will point out are crucial to the application of this law across all Ethnic and social groups. I worked with the Vermont Coalition for

Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools to craft the first bill that Governor Scott signed into law at the start of this legislative session in 2019. We worked very hard to listen to all the people in Vermont, and not only the committee, but the Vermont Senate and House of Representatives concluded this covers all the bases.

I would also like to add that uncoupling the federal law specifically from this law will again make sure that older Vermonters do not have their rights and protections stripped away by an executive order, or whim of a federal agency that looks to cut cost versus protecting citizens. My transgender family has seen an unprecedented loss of our hard won rights in the past 3 years on the federal level, while Vermont, through decree (J.R.S. 18) and actions have kept me safe.

I believe that it is a good bill as written, and with a little addition of inclusive language in the right places, it will be the best bill to help me and other Vermonters like me, stay in Vermont for as long as we can.

The services, supports, and protections described in this bill are the most important thing we older Vermonters will have to ensure we are protected from folks looking to take advantage of us as we age here in the Green Mountain State. Let's make sure it does that for all Vermonters, now and in the future.

Thank you for your time today. Please vote this bill out of committee so that it can become law.

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