

My name for the record is Brenda Churchill, co-liaison to the Statehouse for the LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont.

Thank you Madam Chairman and committee members for inviting me to testify this afternoon.

Today I will speak to the Alliance's work to forward the intent of this bill over the last 4 years and how I have been affected by events during that time.

When I first came to the Vermont Statehouse, my co-liaison Keith Goslant and I met with most top legislators and leaders here. Included was a stop at Attorney General Donovan's office. One part of our discussion was about recently passed legislation in another state concerning a gay panic defense law. It may have been Illinois or Colorado, but in any case, it was in the news and something that caused folks in our LGBTQIA community reached out to the Alliance and asked me questions like, "what is on the books for Vermont to keep this from happening?" and, "what are you doing to keep us safe?"

In my meetings with both Attorney General Donovan and Governor Scott, I was asked the same question: Have you seen a rise in bias incidents or hate toward the LGBTQ community. At the time I said that nothing seemed to be on the radar and I felt safe in Vermont.

Run that thru the next 4 years with an federal administration bent on removing hard fought rights for all marginalized communities and my answer has changed.

A ban on transgender people serving in our military was one of the first actions that opened a wound that began to divide a part of my family from the rest of the world.

Allowing discrimination based on sexuality and gender for religious purposes showed clearly that something had taken a drastic turn.

From white supremacists in city hall park to a candidate for governor that received credible personal threats weekly and sometimes daily, to a simple story hour that garnered hate speech in our towns, the unleashing of bias on gender and sexuality from the top down was clear.

The safety of our community was at risk and continues to be, prompting me to say: I no longer feel safe in the Green Mountain State.

Legal statutes don't always mean social change and acceptance. Over the past four years there has been a validation for exclusion and an increasing lack of Federal protections. We need Vermont to take the lead again and protect our vulnerable citizens. Until we regain what we have lost on the Federal level, Vermont needs to step up. My quote "**Vermont is a state that has often shown the rest of the United States where to go and how to get there.**" has never been more important than it is today.

I support this bill and urge this committee to move it to the next level by supporting those of us who represent the LGBTQ+ community.

Thank you.

Brenda K Churchill