

Transgender Experiences in the Commonwealth



Massachusetts
Transgender
Political
Coalition

People with diverse gender identities and expressions suffer discrimination and harassment throughout Massachusetts. As we wait to hear whether “*An Act Relative to Gender-Based Discrimination and Hate Crimes*” will pass, organizations throughout Massachusetts continue to hear about transgender-related discrimination, harassment and violence.

December/January Intakes

Organizations received 26 calls in December 2009 and January 2010 on transgender-related discrimination, harassment and violence. A short sampling follows:

- A transgender survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault is unable to find a shelter that will accept a transgender person. (1/19/10)
- A transgender man came out at work and fears being fired because HR did not know how to provide support. (12/15/09)
- A transgender college student concerned with the removal of gender identity and expression protections from the college’s non-discrimination policy. (12/2/09)
- A transgender male youth harassed by his teacher for being transgender, and the school administration did not stop the harassment. (12/10/09)
- An employee searching for information on how to support a transgender volunteer in the workplace. Employee wants to provide HR with information to protect the transgender volunteer. (1/7/10)

Transgender Need Not Apply

Lorelei shares her three year struggle to find employment, “but don’t worry,” she says, “this story has a happy ending.”

A native of Massachusetts, Lorelei traveled to Los Angeles to pursue a career in improvisation and worked her way up to both a performer and a manager in a theater. “I’m an open person. I was upfront and honest about my plans to transition both on and off the stage, but I think some people just thought I was a good performer.” Lorelei took a leave of absence to care for her dying grandmother and was told her job would be there when she returned. On leave from work Lorelei transitioned and returned to “polite discrimination.” “Everyone was polite, but distant. I came to work for a couple of days and then was permanently removed from the schedule.”

Unemployed, Lorelei moved back to her hometown and expected to find a more accepting community. “I went to work finding work. I visited every store in Northampton with a help wanted sign in the window only to hear, ‘Oh we’re not really hiring, just accepting applications,’ or, ‘so and so just stepped out.’ As an isolated incident I wouldn’t have thought much of the responses, but three years and hundreds of applications later the polite refusals sounded a lot more like discrimination.”

Lorelei never stopped fighting for work. Unemployed she volunteered for non-profits like Northampton Pride who then invited her to join their board of directors. And, eventually, she landed a job working for a local psychologist.

Sadly, Lorelei’s ‘happy ending’ represents only a minority of transgender people in search of fair employment.

**No names have been changed. Lorelei continues to advocate for transgender protections in the Commonwealth and will speak at the State House on Lobby Day Thursday, January 21.*

***Other Contributing Organizations:** Transgender Civil Rights Coalition, Massachusetts Transgender Legal Advocates, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, Health and Education Services, The Network/La Red, AIDS Project Worcester, Fenway Health, Gay Men’s Domestic Violence Project, Cambridge Cares About AIDS