

ROWAN'S STORY

Hello, my name is Rowan, I am a 26-year old non-binary transgender person living in Holyoke, Massachusetts. In 2016 in excruciating abdominal pain I was diagnosed with my first kidney stone in a western mass emergency room and referred to the only urology practice in my region that takes my insurance. I was refused care on the basis of being transgender being screamed at in front of the waiting room of patients I was “committing fraud” by asking them to verbally refer to me as Rowan even though I understood my birth name which was my legal name would need to be in my chart to bill my insurance and which matched my photo. They told me they wouldn’t treat me unless I paid upfront out of pocket and that they don’t have to treat transgender patients. A medical social worker who supported LGBT patient as my primary care providers practice reached out to try to provide education to urology office, only to tell me she was surprised at how unreceptive they were. Attempting to get the health care I need a second time, I feared I would be physically assaulted after the office manager, who holds his job to this day, a man of larger stature than I, cornered me against a wall and screamed at the top of his lungs that they would not treat me and get out, an incident which left me with PTSD. Because of this my urology care was delayed years, and I continued having kidney stones. In August of 2018, I was taken to a hospital screaming and writing with flank pain and vomiting. I was diagnosed as having multiple kidney stones and urinary tract infection causing swelling of my kidney and acute kidney injury where my kidney function significantly decreased. I needed surgery, but the inpatient urologists didn’t take my insurance at the hospital I presented to, and the same outpatient office staffed all the other hospitals that took my insurance in my Region. They told me “the chart is blocked we cannot treat you per the manager. The reason listed is you are transgender”. Please note that the refusal was not because of an issue related to urinary system anatomy or genitalia, that the refusal was personal and an assertion despite state law they didn’t have to treat me. My primary care provider and the ER staff of the second hospital I was sent to made urgent calls to the Urology group as I screamed in pain and my kidney function was in jeopardy. Eventually the doctor agreed to see me in the hospital but the office manager continued to refuse; making it impossible for me to be scheduled in the chart. The years of delay of care to prevent further kidney stones caused not only numerous episodes of unnecessary suffering, missed work, ambulance and emergency room bills, but risked permanent organ damage to my kidneys, because I am transgender in a state that protects transgender rights.

I also comment as a former employee of Hampden County’s Crisis Services Team to share the story of dozens of clients and transgender friends and loved ones in the greater Boston area and Western MA being denied emergency mental health care on the basis of being transgender. Loved ones have been told by psychiatrists in numerous emergency rooms in the greater Boston area, that as a transgender person with PTSD “no hospital will take you because you are too likely to be raped in their facility”. Dozens of my loved ones have been told across the state “we will not accept you in the open bed in our inpatient psychiatric unit, adult crisis respite, eating disorder program, etc. because we make transgender patients room by themselves, and since only a double is available admitting you would waste a bed” or admitted under deprivation of patient rights, such as being forced to spend their entire stay lodging in a seclusion room because they are transgender instead of lodging in a

double room. Given nearly half of transgender people will attempt suicide due to discrimination and lack of acceptance, the fact that across our state we tell brave young people seeking help saving their life is a “waste” is unacceptable, and ultimately led to the suicide of one of my friends who could not find a hospital to admit them. I am personally aware of these cases in at least half of the counties in the state, including Suffolk, Middlesex, Worcester, Hampshire, Hampden, Franklin, and Berkshire county- every Massachusetts county I have been connected to friends, professional contacts, or advocacy work.

When being called the wrong name, misgendered, treated as a spectacle, a learning opportunity, or without appropriate competence leads dozens of my transgender friends and loved ones in Massachusetts to entirely avoid medical and mental health treatment, including in emergencies, transgender competence and protections in health facilities must be ensured. The sexual harassment or assaults myself and other transgender patients face is routine as part of medical care, where in intakes with ophthalmologists, therapists, etc. we are asked to graphically describe our genitalia by specialists, including mental health specialists who would explicitly recognize this as sexual harassment should a cisgender woman be asked this in an outpatient therapy intake, and inappropriate non consensual touching of breasts, chests and genitalia while expressing fascination, curiosity, or hostility that did not have any medical purpose resulting in trauma that has left numerous loved ones to fail to seek care in a medical emergency in fear saving their life would include another sexual assault.

I urge you to ensure that transgender patient rights are explicitly protected, and that violations of these policies are enforceable in an urgent manner. The current protections are already inadequate. I urge you to protect lives by ensuring affirming respectful health care for transgender people in our state. Thank you.