

# Testimony on a Transgender Rights Bill

## Massachusetts Catholic Conference

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*Civil rights laws in Massachusetts prohibit discrimination on the basis of personal characteristics such as race, sex, and religion. In the 2009–2010 legislative session, advocates for so-called transgender rights filed a bill in the Massachusetts state legislature to extend civil rights protections to those who want to assert a sexual identity that does not correspond to their biological sex. The bill would amend existing civil rights laws by adding to the list of impermissible discriminatory criteria the words “gender identity or expression.” The Roman Catholic Bishops in Massachusetts oppose the legislation and submitted the following testimony in 2009 through their public policy office, the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, explaining their objections. The testimony by MCC Executive Director Edward F. Saunders Jr. provides an extensive moral, legal, and policy critique of expanding civil rights laws in a manner giving any individual the right to identify as the opposite biological sex and forcing others to accept that identification. The proposed change in Massachusetts represents the latest in a global campaign to deconstruct sex and gender through civil rights mandates. We reprint the MCC testimony as a service to those concerned about similar legislation in their own jurisdictions.—DANIEL AVILA, J.D.*

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“Conference”) respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to House 1728/Senate 1687, “An Act Relative to Gender Based Discrimination and Hate Crimes.”

### Summary of the Bill

Section 1           Amends the state “hate crimes” reporting statute (M.G.L. c. 22C, §§ 32-35). The bill authorizes law enforcement agencies participating in a voluntary statewide project that compiles data on

crime incidents to include in their incident reports “hate crimes” motivated by prejudice against the victim’s “gender identity or expression.” The reporting statute defines “hate crime” as “any criminal act coupled with overt actions motivated by bigotry and bias,” and currently includes “racial, religious, ethnic, handicap, gender, and sexual orientation prejudice.”

Section 2 Amends the state “hate crimes” criminal statute penalizing personal or property assaults intended to intimidate the victim because of the victim’s race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or disability (M.G.L. c. 265, § 39), by adding “gender identity or expression.” The bill thus adds a category of assaults based on the victim’s gender identity or expression to a statutory scheme that, when involving status-based intimidation, increases the maximum fine from \$1,000 to \$5,000 for assaults that do not cause bodily injury, and from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for assaults resulting in bodily injury, and allows for triple damages in assault cases causing property damage.

Sections 3-6 Amend various state statutes governing public schools and charter schools (M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 89(f) and (l); M.G.L. c. 76, §§ 5 and 12B(j)) by adding “gender identity or expression” as a protected status to non-discrimination requirements related to school admission and activities.

Sections 7-23 Amend the state statute (M.G.L. c. 151B) prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, insurance, credit, and real estate transactions. The bill adds “gender identity or expression” as a protected status to numerous non-discrimination provisions in Chapter 151B, which currently prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, ancestry and handicap. Section 7 of the bill defines “gender identity or expression” as “a gender-related identity, appearance, expression, or behavior of an individual, regardless of the individual’s assigned sex at birth.”

Sections 24-26 Amend the state statute prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation (M.G.L. c. 272, §§ 92A and 98) by adding “gender identity or expression” to the protected status list, which currently includes race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, deafness, blindness or any physical or mental disability, and ancestry. Thus the bill would guarantee “the full enjoyment of accommodations consistent with an individual’s gender identity or expression” in such places as public schools, rest rooms, swimming pools, bathhouses, and with limited exceptions, exercise facilities (see Section 25 of the bill). Under the current statute (M.G.L. c. 272, § 98), protection against status-based discrimination in public accommodations “is recognized and declared to be a civil right.”

Sections 27–31 Expand the membership of the advisory board of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination by requiring the inclusion of “people of diverse gender identities or expressions” (amending M.G.L. c. 6, § 56) and add “transgender youth” to the title and scope of the Massachusetts Commission on Gay, and Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth (amending M.G.L. c. 3, § 67).

### **Preliminary Considerations**

Every individual human being possesses an inherent personal dignity that includes the right not to be subjected to violence or unjust discrimination. All violence against persons is reprehensible and deserves condemnation regardless of the motivation.<sup>1</sup> Differential treatment in the provision of services, accommodation or access, however, is not always objectionable. Rather, it is only arbitrary discrimination, based on prejudice, that lacks any connection to principles of justice or the common good, which must be opposed.

As observed in a 1984 statement by the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth against a bill to add sexual preference as a protected classification,

It must be remembered always that there is a necessary distinction, very often ignored, between unjust discrimination (the arbitrary limitation of human rights) and the necessary limitation placed on the exercise of human rights whenever such actions would interfere with the just rights of others and harm society. All people of good will must oppose unjust discrimination. However, there are times in our lives when each of us experiences the pain, discomfort and challenges of necessary limitations on our rights whenever there is a prudent judgment that the common good is at stake.<sup>2</sup>

House bill 1728/Senate bill 1687 seeks to prohibit discrimination against persons on the basis of their “gender identity” or “gender expression.” These terms are broadly defined in the bill to include all forms of “gender-related identity, appearance, expression, or behavior,” and are to be protected even when one’s asserted identity, appearance, expression or behavior is determined not to correspond to one’s biological sex.

The bill raises a critical policy question. Is it unjust or otherwise in conflict with the common good to bar individuals from qualifying for sex-specific services, accommodations, or access due to their own biological sex and despite their claimed identification with the opposite biological sex?

The Conference submits that, based on policy-related concerns to be discussed in the next section, differential treatment that limits eligibility according to one’s biological identity as male or female, and not according to one’s self-identification,

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<sup>1</sup>See New York State Catholic Conference, Statement on Hate Crimes Legislation (November 16, 1999), [http://www.nyscatholicconference.org/pages/news/show\\_newsDetails.asp?id=89](http://www.nyscatholicconference.org/pages/news/show_newsDetails.asp?id=89).

<sup>2</sup>Massachusetts Catholic Conference, Statement of the Bishops (May 31, 1984), <http://www.macathconf.org/Archives1984BishopsStatementSexOrientationMay31.pdf>.

comports with justice and the common good. If enacted, the bill instead would violate established principles of justice contrary to the common good.<sup>3</sup>

### Practical Policy Concerns

The bill would require places of public accommodation and public schools in Massachusetts to grant to a broad category of individuals access to sex-specific programs, services, or places solely on the basis of each one's self-assertion that he or she identifies with the qualifying sex designation. Three immediate policy concerns arise.

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<sup>3</sup>The policy issues to be addressed below are distinct from the philosophical issues also raised by the bill. The Roman Catholic Church agrees with the metaphysical proposition, informed by biblical theology, that the body and soul of the human being are united, such that one's sexual identity is rooted in one's biological identity as male or female. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 364, 365, 2332, 2333, 2393. Thus in Catholic teaching, sexual difference is considered "a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman." Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World, no. 8 (2004). The Church regards this view of reality as normative, obliging men and women to accept their biological identity as their sexual identity. See *Catechism* at no. 2393 ("By creating the human being man and woman, God gives personal dignity equally to the one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his [and her] sexual identity."). "If the Church speaks of the nature of the human being as man and woman, and demands that this order of creation be respected, this is not some antiquated metaphysics. What is involved here is faith in the Creator and a readiness to listen to the 'language' of creation. To disregard this would be the self-destruction of man himself, and hence the destruction of God's own work. What is often expressed and understood by the term 'gender' ultimately ends up being man's attempt at self-emancipation from creation and the Creator." Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the Roman Curia for the Traditional Exchange of Christmas Greetings (December 22, 2008). The filing of this bill in Massachusetts is part of a movement to persuade the courts and legislatures to establish what one Massachusetts author refers to as "a right to gender self-determination" that "transcends the binary" and overrides "a legal regime which vigilantly polices the brutal boundaries of male and female," and thus the legislation raises provocative philosophical questions. See Laura K. Langley, "Self-Determination in a Gender Fundamentalist State: Toward Legal Liberation of Transgender Identities," *Texas Journal on Civil Liberties and Civil Rights* 12 (Fall 2006): 101, 103 (2006-07). (The author is identified as a Northeastern University School of Law student and graduate of Boston University.) Recently the Holy See objected to a proposal at the United Nations to establish gender identity as a protected classification in international law partly on the grounds that "it takes up controversial concepts [that] imply that sexual identity is defined solely by culture and is thus susceptible to be transformed at will, according to individual desire or historical and social influences." Statement of the Holy See on the Declaration on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (December 18, 2008). The bill before this Committee would similarly involve the General Court in the endorsement of a controversial philosophical view, as evidenced by the language in the bill referring to an "individual's assigned sex at birth," as if one's status as male or female comes into being not as the result of one's own prenatal make-up of DNA but because of some post-natal human assignment. The Conference respectfully suggests that taking sides in this sort of philosophical debate lies beyond the legislature's competence. Policy considerations aside, the Conference opposes the bill in its entirety since all of its provisions rely on an understanding of "gender identity" that conflicts with Church and natural law teaching.

*Destabilizing Legal Impact*

First, as approvingly acknowledged by a supporter of “a right to gender self-determination,” “[c]laiming that all people have a right to determine their genders destabilizes the male/female binary upon which numerous social spaces and legal rights, entitlements and documents depend.”<sup>4</sup> The state would have to legally accommodate the decisions of individuals to “identify as any combination of gender identity referents simultaneously or identify differently in different contexts or communities” regardless of the legal consequences.<sup>5</sup>

Given the destabilizing objective of the campaign for “gender self-determination,” it is not surprising that the bill now before this Committee was intentionally drafted broadly so as to permit any person for any reason to demand under state law to be identified with the particular sexual designation he or she chooses at any moment.<sup>6</sup>

The bill’s passage would launch the Commonwealth into a chaotically shifting legal milieu by forbidding the state from requiring an individual’s self-identification for legal purposes to comply with any time limitation, documentation, or other commitment that formalizes and stabilizes one’s individual sex designation. An individual would be legally empowered to pose as both a man and a woman at different times or at the same time, and for any length of time, however short in duration.

*Violation of the Right of Privacy*

Second, there remains the biological fact of opposite sex differences of a physiological nature which underpin important legal and social policies; these policies would be undercut or negated by the bill. The bill’s broad scope implicates a host of potential conflicts in a variety of areas.

For example, many sex-specific services, accommodations or places exist as a means of protecting the privacy interests of those who use them. Specifically, all

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<sup>4</sup>Langley, *Self-Determination in a Gender Fundamentalist State*, supra note 3, at 102.

<sup>5</sup>Id. at 104. A publication by a national transgender rights organization distributed to homeless shelters, although it recommends that males who identify themselves as female should have access to women’s shelters, acknowledges that biological females residing in homeless shelters for women may be confused and upset by biological males seeking access to the same shelter “who identify as both genders or alternate genders,” and who seek to “pass” as “a woman at night but dress[ ] as a male during the day.” National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute & National Coalition for the Homeless, *Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People* 38 (2003), <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/TransitioningOurShelters.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>Ethan Jacobs, “Advocates, Opponents of Trans Rights Bill to Have Their Say on Beacon Hill,” *BayWindows.com*, Feb. 28, 2008, at <http://www.baywindows.com/index.php?ch=news&sc=glbt&sc2=news&sc3=&id=70904> (see comments of Laura Langley and Jennifer Levi about drafting the bill with the intent of protecting the right of even “non-transgendered-identified” persons to access single-sex settings despite being of the opposite biological sex).

individuals have the constitutionally protected right of privacy in shielding one's body from exposure to persons of the opposite biological sex in situations involving partial or full disrobing in close quarters.<sup>7</sup>

The bill interferes with this fundamental right by expressly granting access to *all* individuals of one biological sex (regardless of whether they have undergone sex reassignment surgery or are otherwise diagnosed as gender-dysphoric)<sup>8</sup> into settings designated for exclusive use by members of the other biological sex, including in rest rooms, bathhouses, exercise facilities, shelters and public school locker rooms. See Section 25 of the bill.

Single-sex services, programs and facilities take into account the sensitive nature of having to partially or fully disrobe in front of others, an experience of invaded privacy that, when occurring in the presence of members of the opposite biological sex, increases diametrically the sense of one's personal vulnerability. Single-sex policies are designed to shield persons from having to disrobe in the presence of, or from witnessing bodily exposures by, members of the opposite biological sex. The right to privacy applies independently from the issue of security, for even the most

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<sup>7</sup>See *Safford Unified School District #1 v. Redding*, 557 U.S. \_\_\_\_, slip op. at 8 (June 25, 2009) (affirming the “reasonable societal expectations of personal privacy” where exposure of the human body is concerned and emphasizing the embarrassment and intrusiveness to children of involuntary exposure); see also *York v. Story*, 324 F.2d 450, 455 (9th Cir. 1963), cert. den. 376 U.S. 939 (1964) (“We cannot conceive of a more basic subject of privacy than the naked body. The desire to shield one's unclothed figure from view of strangers, and particularly strangers of the opposite sex, is impelled by elementary self-respect and personal dignity.”); *Forts v. Ward*, 621 F.2d 1210, 1217 (2d Cir. 1980) (recognizing that the “interest entitled to protection concerns the involuntary viewing of private parts of the body by members of the opposite sex”); *Fisher v. Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority*, 690 F.2d 1133, 1142 (4th Cir. 1982) (recognizing a “general right, constitutionally protected, not to be subjected by state action to involuntary exposure in a state of nakedness to members of the opposite sex”); *Cumby v. Meachum*, 684 F.2d 712, 714 (10th Cir. 1982) (finding that the constitutional right of privacy is violated by state policies that result in involuntary exposure to the view of persons of the opposite sex of such personal activities “as undressing, using toilet facilities, or showering”); *Everson v. Michigan Dept. of Corrections*, 391 F.3d 737, 757 (6th Cir. 2004) (“Most people ‘have a special sense of privacy in their genitals, and involuntary exposure of them in the presence of people of the other sex may be especially demeaning and humiliating.”); *Brannum v. Overton County School Board*, 516 F.3d 489, 495 (6th Cir. 2008) (“Perhaps it is merely an abundance of common experience that leads inexorably to the conclusion that there must be a fundamental constitutional right to be free from forced exposure of one's person to strangers of the opposite sex when not reasonably necessary for some legitimate, overriding reason, for the obverse would be repugnant to notions of human dignity and personal integrity.”).

<sup>8</sup>Gender dysphoria involves “persistent discomfort about one's assigned sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender-role of that sex” that causes “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.” American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed., text rev. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2000), § 302.9.

secure areas that nonetheless allow access to persons of the opposite sex, thereby increasing the risk of unavoidable opposite-sex bodily exposure, violate the right.

In effect, the bill would require the state to elevate the interests of those, who, for whatever reason, wish to enter rest rooms and like facilities designated for persons of the opposite biological sex and where bodily exposure regularly occurs, over the fundamental, constitutionally protected privacy interests of those who desire to prevent such exposure by avoiding opposite-sex settings. Changing the law in a way that disassociates “gender identity” from biological references cannot change the reality of physiological sexual difference which forms the very basis of the privacy right at issue.<sup>9</sup>

The bill would require Massachusetts law to prefer the desires and interests of the person who asserts that he or she identifies with the opposite biological sex, thus taking precedence over other important interests rooted in biological facts as if those facts can be ignored or wished away.

#### *Overbroad Remedy*

As already noted, the bill seeks to vindicate the interests of a class of persons that is broadly defined. As a result, the protected class would include those individuals who already have access to services, accommodations, facilities or programs designed for use by members of their own biological sex, and yet who need not show under the bill that taking advantage of the presently allowed access will pose any hardship to them. The bill would grant them the right of entry to services, accommodations or programs designed for use by members of the opposite biological sex solely on the basis of their self-assertion that they happen to identify with that biological sex at the time of entry.<sup>10</sup>

The United States Supreme Court has adopted a narrower legal definition of “transsexual” persons based on medical authorities. According to the Court, a person who is to be considered transsexual is “one who has ‘[a] rare psychiatric disorder in which a person feels persistently uncomfortable about his or her anatomical sex,’ and

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<sup>9</sup>In addition, to take another example of potential conflict, insurance policies are designed to accommodate the statistical differences in life expectancy and other actuarial factors related to each of the biological sexes. The scope of the bill raises the question of whether insurers would be forbidden to arrange insurance plans according to the insured’s biological sex if the insured self-identifies with the opposite sex. Again, changing the law in a way that gives individuals the right to identify with one or the other biological sex regardless of biological realities cannot make those realities disappear.

<sup>10</sup>Supporters of the bill claim that under the bill entry into sex-specific avenues such as women’s gyms would be allowed only for “those transgender women who can certify their gender via established Massachusetts medical protocol.” *The Truth about H. 1728/S. 1687* [2009], <http://www.masstpc.org/publications/legis/debunking-apr09.pdf> (noting that the document was “compiled by GLAD, MPTC and the Transgender Civil Rights Coalition”) (see response to “Myth 3”). The bill does not refer to any medical protocol or protocol requirement (nor do supporters identify the whereabouts of such a requirement), and the Conference is unaware of any state-mandated protocol existing under other state laws.

who typically seeks medical treatment, including hormonal therapy and surgery, to bring about a permanent sex change.”<sup>11</sup> As one of the bill’s drafters explains, however, under the bill “[a] transgender person who identifies as a particular gender would be entitled to use bathroom, locker room and other single-sex facilities for that gender, regardless of whether or not they have had surgery or are taking hormones.”<sup>12</sup>

The bill therefore seeks to impose a far-reaching and unfairly skewed remedy that bears no reasonable relation to the true dimensions of any problem that might actually be at issue. If there are individuals who for medical reasons experience “clinically significant” discomfort<sup>13</sup> in certain settings, the solution is not to override the privacy interests of other persons. It is a contradiction to argue that the discomfort of one group requires the granting of access to other settings that then causes the discomfort of another group, as if the discomfort of those others who rely on the privacy of single-sex settings does not count.<sup>14</sup> The legislature is equipped to investigate the actual dimensions of the problem and to explore ways of addressing the issue of discomfort in certain places caused by medical conditions and finding solutions that respect the privacy and comfort of everyone.<sup>15</sup> The bill fails to provide an even-handed remedy.

#### *Interference with Conscience*

A fourth category of concerns arises from the fact that the bill will create issues of conscience. For example, advocates for the bill admit that the non-discrimination mandate contained therein will interfere with and override the religious interests of faith-based providers of services and programs offered to the general public. A flyer produced in April 2009 and posted online by the Gays & Lesbians Advocates & Defenders, the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, and the Transgender Civil Rights Coalition explains that current religious exemptions in the law are limited and thus “people of faith running commercial enterprises (like hospitals) cannot pick and choose among customers.”<sup>16</sup> This raises the prospect that religious institutions will be forced under the bill to violate their religious principles in circumstances involving “gender identity” discrimination claims.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 829 (1994) (quoting American Medical Association, *Encyclopedia of Medicine* 1006 (1989)).

<sup>12</sup>Laura Langley, Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, as quoted in Jacobs, *supra* note 6.

<sup>13</sup>See *supra* note 8.

<sup>14</sup>See comments of Jennifer Levi as reported in Jacobs, *supra* note 6 (“discomfort should not be at the heart of the refusal to adopt non-discrimination laws”).

<sup>15</sup>For example, the state could mandate the creation of sex-neutral accommodations identified for use by persons uncomfortable in settings with other individuals of their same biological sex.

<sup>16</sup>*The Truth about H. 1728/S. 1687*, *supra* note 10 (see response to “Myth 6”).

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, Catholic News Agency, “Catholic Hospital to Allow Transgender Surgery after Being Sued,” Mar. 3, 2008, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new>.

Considering the impact of the bill in the medical setting is instructive. Current protocols require sensitivity to the dynamics of patient examinations in situations where the medical provider and the patient are of different biological sexes. The bill would complicate these situations by granting individuals who identify with the opposite biological sex the civil right to override those protocols, thereby posing conflicts for the exercise of individual and institutional conscience heretofore protected by the protocols.

### *Conclusion*

Creating a new “right to gender self-determination,” as this bill would accomplish as a matter of practice, would destabilize the law, override privacy, and conflict with conscience. As a result, the bill would interfere with core interests, policies and protections that flow from considerations of justice and the common good.

### **Position of the Conference**

On the basis of the foregoing, the Conference urges the Committee to give an unfavorable report recommending that House bill 1728/Senate bill 1687 ought not pass.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.

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php?n=11967, detailing case of Seton Medical Center in Daly City, California, where a lawsuit was filed against the Catholic hospital alleging discrimination based on the hospital’s religious-based initial refusal to allow a sex change operation to be performed in its institution.