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Sent: Wednesday, June 08, 2011 11:50 AM
To: Avitzur, Michael (SEN)
Subject:

RIGHTS FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE | Globe Editorial

A matter of simple justice

June 8, 2011

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A PROPOSED ban on discrimination against transgender people would have virtually no effect on most people in Massachusetts. But it would enormously improve the lives of a small minority, whose ability to find jobs and places to live is compromised by the fact that their gender identity differs from their sex at birth.

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The bill would forbid discrimination on the basis of gender identity in areas such as employment, housing, and public accommodations, and would add offenses based on gender identity to the list of potential hate crimes. The measure comes up for a hearing today before the Legislature's Judiciary Committee — which in previous years never even brought the bill to a vote, much less sent it to the floor.

Passing the bill would continue this Commonwealth's long tradition of equal rights; to do otherwise would be a deeply ungenerous act toward people who are far more exposed to bias than many other groups protected by anti-discrimination statutes.

Opponents would rather not contend with the hardships that transgender people face. It's easier to call the measure a "Bathroom Bill," on the ludicrous theory that a heterosexual male predator could sneak into the ladies' room by pretending to be transgender — as if there were someone checking IDs at the restroom door. The "Bathroom Bill" talk is nothing but a cheap way to play on some legislators' unease about the subject.

Giving in to playground insults is unworthy of the Legislature. The 15 states, scores of localities, and numerous public and private employers that have sworn off discrimination on the basis of gender identity have experienced no ill consequences. Meanwhile, the transgender residents of Massachusetts need the protections this bill provides.

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