

National Organization for Women – Massachusetts

727 Atlantic Avenue • 3rd Floor • Boston, MA 02111 • Phone: 617-254-9130
Fax: 617-254-9134 • E-Mail: beth@massnow.org • www.massnow.org

May 16, 2011

Chairwoman Cynthia Stone Creem
Room 405
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Chairman Eugene L. O'Flaherty
Room 136
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Creem, Chairman O'Flaherty, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

For 40 years, the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women (Mass. NOW) has worked tirelessly to ensure equal rights for women and girls in the Commonwealth. Mass. NOW works on all fronts for women's equality, and for all individuals' access to civil rights, legal protections from discrimination, and freedom from violence and harassment.

We write today to support *An Act Relative to Transgender Equal Rights* (HB 502 / SB 764). This bill would give legal protections for some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable women and men—members of the transgender community. This legislation would help ensure that all women are safer in their homes and in their workplaces, and that they are protected against gender discrimination in employment, housing, credit, public accommodations, and education.

You may have heard claims from opponents of *An Act Relative to Transgender Equal Rights* that this legislation will make public facilities unsafe, that it will put women and children in harm's way by providing some kind of safe harbor for individuals to enter bathrooms and commit crimes. This is categorically untrue, and Mass. NOW is offended at the very suggestion that this legislation would in any way endanger women and children.

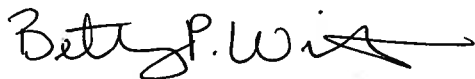
Apart from being false and intended to mislead and scare the Committee, the suggestion that this bill will do harm to women ignores the reality that women and children are not in the most danger from an attack by a stranger. Women and children are in the most danger in their very own homes, by the people who should love them most.

Violence against women and children *is* very real—but it's a reality that is not reflected in the opposition's claims. The law provides consequences for anyone who commits a crime, and this legislation will *in no way* change these consequences. Moreover, this argument completely ignores the fact that members of the transgender community are incredibly vulnerable to having violence committed against them. For instance, last month in Chelsea, MA, a transgender woman was brutally beaten and hospitalized—she was lucky to survive.

Recently, Governor Deval Patrick signed an Executive Order prohibiting discrimination for transgender state employees. This was a huge step in the right direction, which we applaud; however, the rest of the transgender community must also be protected from discrimination, and that will only happen with the passage of this legislation.

All women deserve to be protected from violence and discrimination, and this bill would provide an essential tool in the fight to ensure that women in Massachusetts are safe and secure in their homes, workplaces, and public spaces. Mass. NOW urges you to give a favorable reporting to *An Act Relative to Transgender Equal Rights*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bethany P. Withers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Bethany P. Withers
Policy and Programs Manager