



47 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014
tel 212.627.0305
fax 212.627.4136

100 South Swan, Suite 412
Albany, NY 12210
tel 518.472.3330
fax 518.472.3334

74 Goodman Street North
Suite C-269
Rochester, NY 14607
tel 716.271.2420
fax 716.271.0216

106 S. Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14201
tel 716.852.2297
fax 716.836.6148

www.prideagenda.org

Deputy Palmer
Jeff Soref
Co-Chairs
Gregory Kerr, MD
Amy Zimmerman
Vice Chairs
Craig Bossi
Treasurer
Suzanne Burnley
Secretary

Debbie Blitekoff
Bland
Dora Burns
Jette Burton, Ph.D.
Bob Cooper
ynthia Dames
Andrés Duque
David Eng
Thomas C. Farah
Thomas F. Ferrarese
Kate Gallivan
Jim Grant
Todd Hamilton
David Hansell
Douglas W. Jones
Brian Kawaler, Ph.D.
Suzanne Kelly
Colin Knox
Mark Levine
Sean Maloney
Donnie McEwan
Henry S. Paul
Lifford Richner
Pat Rogers
Sean Smoak
Tom Tompkins
Doby Usnik
David Verchère
J. Vineburgh
Ive F. Watson
Ellen M. Yacklin

ADMINISTRATION & PROGRAM

Matt Foreman
Executive Director
Joseph S. Grabarz, Jr.
Deputy Executive Director
Heila Healy
Foundation Program Director
Ross D. Levi
Legislative Counsel
Rosemary E. Coluccio
Director of Finance & Administration
Joe Taver
Media Director
Ellen Richards
Alpha Wilson
Bill Goodman
Stephen Sebor
Dorey Thorpe
Field Staff
Ara Herman
Program Associate
Carolyn Pope
M. O'Helen
Administrative Assistants
Aylen LaTorre
Database Manager

DEVELOPMENT

Frank Stasio
Director of Development
Erin McHugh
Director-Member & Institutional Support
Nich DeNagel
Development Associate

Testimony in Support of Intro. No. 754
**A Measure to Extend Non-Discrimination
Protections to Transgender Persons**

Matt Foreman, Executive Director

Empire State Pride Agenda

May 4, 2001

On behalf of the 25,000 members of the Empire State Pride Agenda across New York, I am proud to support Intro. 754, a bill to extend non-discrimination protections to transgender persons. We are proud to have been a partner with NYAGRA from the start of this effort, and I want to specifically recognize the leadership of Pauline Park over the last 18 months.

First, I would like to thank you, Chairman DiBrienza, for holding these hearings. We – through our predecessor organization FAIRPAC – are proud to have supported your first run for the council and we cannot begin to thank you enough for your unwavering commitment to our community ever since. I also thank the many members of the City Council who have worked so hard to bring us to this important day, particularly Margarita Lopez, Bill Perkins, Christine Quinn, Ronnie Eldridge, and Phil Reed. And, finally, we recognize Speaker Vallone for supporting today's hearings.

With the other people testifying here today, I do not need to tell you why this legislation is necessary and important. Even without public hearings, no thinking person can deny that discrimination against transgender people is pervasive and appalling. I have seen it and felt it firsthand.

I do, however, want to make three points. First, I think we should all take note of what a difference 15 years makes. As many people here will recall, it took a bitter, 15-year struggle – from the early 70's through to 1986 – to extend non-discrimination protections to lesbians and gay men. And, even today, we do not have those protections statewide. So many of us sat through ugly, demeaning and degrading public hearings, year after year. We saw this same committee vote that bill down time and again, and then saw the same thing happen on the Council floor.

How many times did we hear that the City would fall apart, that the sky would fall, that heaven's wrath would be upon us. Well, thanks to leadership of people like you, Mr. Chairman, that bill finally did pass. And, contrary to the predictions of our opponents back then, the sky did not fall and the City is a better place for protecting gay people from discrimination.

Fifteen years later, a community that is part of the lesbian and gay community, but one with distinct needs and aspirations is here now seeking the same basic protections from discrimination in employment and housing. While there are still bigots out there, and you will hear from them today, look at how even the atmosphere in this chamber has changed. In just a year and a half, this bill comes before you with 25 co-sponsors and majority support in the Council. We should all be proud of that.

Just like the City became a better place when it protected gay men and lesbians from discrimination, it will be a still better place when it does the same for transgender people.

Second, we ask that you not be distracted by the incoherent legal memo from the Department of Law purporting to conclude that transgender persons could be covered by existing law. Given that we were told exactly the opposite when we met with Commission staff over a year ago, we can only conclude this memorandum is nothing more than a deliberate attempt to derail this bill. The facts speak for themselves: the Commission does not have a policy on this, has not been receptive to taking cases of anti-transgender discrimination in the past, and has not one brochure, one poster, one thing to back them up speaks for itself. Moreover, the Commission's memo only cites legal theories – and one of them is patently offensive. The discrimination faced by transgender people is not a theory, but pain reality that deserves to be addressed explicitly in the law.

Finally, as important as these hearings are, they are not an end in themselves. The end goal is, of course, a law. After today's testimony, anyone who says this bill is not necessary is either blind to reality or uncaring about the gross injustices faced every day by transgender people. Therefore it is absolutely, positively essential that this bill be brought to the full Council for a vote before the end of the year. We understand politics and the reality that some members will want to wait until after the fall elections to vote. That's fine. But to put this off for the new Council to take up in 2002 would be a disgrace.

Thank you.

Founded in 1990, the Empire State Pride Agenda is New York's statewide, non-partisan lesbian and gay political advocacy organization. Our mission is to end discrimination and prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation. The Pride Agenda fights for equal rights under the law by lobbying state and local elected officials, electing supportive candidates to office, organizing constituent pressure, and educating the public. Recent victories include the enactment of a statewide hate crimes law, repeal of the consensual sodomy statute, and the passing of local non-discrimination measures in Westchester County, Nassau County, and Buffalo. With 25,000 supporters statewide, it has offices and staff in Albany, Buffalo, Ithaca, Long Island, New York City, and Rochester.