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## **REP. ANDREWS CALLS TO ADVANCE MASSACHUSETTS'S LEGACY OF CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERSHIP BY ENACTING THE TRANSGENDER BILL**

“A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess.”

Massachusetts citizens and their government are known for and are called to be key leaders in advancing our society, a society that respects and is just to all. Once again, we have a chance to continue this calling and legacy.

Massachusetts has the opportunity to advance civil rights by passing the Transgender Equal Rights Bill. I am a proud sponsor of the Transgender Equal Rights Bill, which would add protections for transgender people to existing Massachusetts civil rights laws, which currently prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, race, creed, color, national origin, sexual orientation, sex, and marital status in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations, education, and credit. This bill would also add violent offenses against transgender people to the list of criminal acts that are subject to treatment as hate crimes.

Although some confusion exists around what it means to be transgender, it's actually quite simple. Transgender people live as the opposite sex from what they were born as. Transgender people grow up feeling like they were born in the wrong body, that the gender they feel inside does not match their gender on the outside. At some point in their lives, transgender people decide they must live their lives in the gender they have always known themselves to be, and often transition to living as that gender.

I have worked with others for over 25 years in the private sector, to advance civil rights and diversity and inclusion. I've had the privilege to learn and teach diversity and inclusion to thousands of people, in over 23 countries, who desire to engage and to progress on these issues. What I've found to be a common experience across all countries is that on many diversity and civil rights issues, there are commonly held beliefs. There are, also, fundamental disagreements that will never be changed. However, even with these fundamental differences progress can occur. What I have learned, developed and taught leaders is that if we embrace the principle, “we do not need to agree but we must ensure respect, compassion and justice for all”, we can progress. Leaders in international and local companies understand the importance of spearheading civil rights and diversity in order to both attract and retain top talent, as well as it is an essential way to create competitive advantages in the market place. Many leaders and companies have already enacted policies and benefits to insure that transgender individuals are given the same rights, protection, benefits and respect as their colleagues enjoy.

I, also, Chair Governor Patrick's Non Discrimination, Equal Opportunity and Diversity Advisory Council for our Commonwealth. Our charter is to move Massachusetts to be a global model and an exemplar state in diversity by 2020. In order to achieve this it will require Massachusetts to accelerate our progress and actions in civil rights and diversity and inclusion. Massachusetts leads in many areas but still has a long way to go in other areas, Transgender equality is one of those areas where we are lagging. There are approximately 34 countries/territories that are actively making progress on transgender rights, protection and justice. South Africa lead progress in 2003 and several countries have since followed, including Bolivia, Pakistan, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Turkey, Israel, New Zealand and the Netherlands. In 2009, the United States, after a decade of struggle, passed and President Obama signed into law the Federal Hate Crime Law, an inclusive hate crimes bill that includes gender identity. Today, at the local level, approximately fifteen states plus Washington DC and 132 cities including Boston, Cambridge, Northampton and Amherst have enacted laws to include gender identity/expression to non-discrimination and hate crime laws.

After benchmarking with other public and private organizations that have advanced transgender rights and benefits, one should conclude that passing the Transgender Equality Bill is logical and straightforward.

However, there is also a moral and emotional analysis that we need to consider.

We must not be ignorant or emotionally disconnected from the reality that we in this commonwealth are not consistently treating people with respect, with compassion or justly. Discrimination, harassment, minimization and disparities are a reality for the vast majority of our transgender brothers and sisters in our Commonwealth.

Our transgender coworkers, neighbors, friends, and family members remain vulnerable. Transgender men and women can be denied housing or evicted simply because of who they are. They can be fired from their jobs simply because of who they are. They can be denied entry to a school program, denied credit, or refused service in a restaurant simply because of who they are. And hard as it may be to believe, it happens. A national survey of 6,500 transgender men and women published earlier this year found that transgender people have double the rate of unemployment as the general population; 47 percent reported that they had been discriminated against in the workplace because of who they are; nearly 20 percent had been homeless at one point in their lives because of who they are; and 53 percent said that they had been openly harassed in a public place such as a restaurant, hotel, airport, or government agency because of who they are.

Historically, whenever legislation is proposed to grant equal rights for any minority group, i.e.: women, African American, gay, or transgender people, legislators are bombarded with calls and emails from different groups claiming that affording basic civil rights to all individuals will in some way endanger the general population. I've received some of those calls and emails. These groups use others ignorance and use fear as a tactic to convince both legislators and the general public that their lives will be negatively affected by granting equal rights.

It is because this legislation is so simple and so necessary that leaders in government, including Governor Deval Patrick and Attorney General Martha Coakley, have endorsed it. More than 100 faith leaders around the state have signed a declaration of support for the bill. Meanwhile, more than 100 businesses in the state, including Staples, CVS, Raytheon, and TJX Companies already have employment non-discrimination measures in place to protect their transgender employees.

We must ask ourselves as elected leaders, if we or members of our family faced these injustices would we tolerate it? I choose to believe our collective unanimous answer would be “no”. The reality, however, is that members of our extended family are facing these injustices daily, and I respectfully implore you to care deeply and to act in order to end tolerance of these injustices and disrespect.

I respectfully call on my colleagues in the legislature to extend equal rights to this vulnerable and underserved population by passing the Transgender Equal Rights Bill, thus continuing the legacy of Massachusetts’ civil rights leadership.

With God speed, thank you.

Second Franklin District State Representative Denise Andrews