

TRANSGENDER RIGHTS POSITION PAPER

Since the founding of The Staten Island Democratic Association in 1961, we have taken pride in being Staten Island's oldest, largest and most Progressive Democratic Club. It has come to the attention of the Staten Island Democratic Association that we must take a stand on the rights of Transgender Americans, New Yorkers and especially Staten Islanders.

It is a time when so many Transgender people are under attack for nothing less than being who they are.

Harvey Milk (the first openly gay person elected to public office in California) once said "It takes no compromise to give people their rights...it takes no money to respect the individual. It takes no political deal to give people freedom. It takes no survey to remove repression."

Background

Gender is a human social system of differentiation by sex for roles, behaviors, characteristics, appearances, and identities (e.g. "man" or "woman"). Gender maps cultural meanings and norms about both sex and gender on human bodies. Everyone has an internal sense of their "gender" and this sense is called "gender identity".¹

"Most people's gender identity is congruent with their assigned sex, but many people experience their identity to be discordant with their natal sex (sex assigned at birth)".²

"Transgender" is a broad term used to describe those whose gender identity, or gender expression is in some sense different from, or transgresses social norms for, their assigned birth sex. Transgender may include those who identify as being transsexual, cross dresser, androgynous, bi-gender, no-gender or multi-gender, genderqueer, and a growing number of people who do not identify as belonging to any gender category at all. For some transgender people individual discomfort with a social gender role is accompanied by a profound sense of mismatch of the physical body to their internal bodily experience. This body dysphoria (known as "gender dysphoria") causes significant distress, negatively impacts daily functioning and well being, and requires medical services in order to realign the body with the self. There are many transgender people with medically diagnosed inter sex conditions.³ In the absence of systematic data collection, estimates vary widely as to the number of transgender individuals in the United States, ranging from 3 million to as many as 9 million individuals.⁴ Prevalence of transgender identities is likely to be on the order of at least 1:100 (i.e. 1%), and transsexualism is also not rare, with prevalence now being estimated at between 1:2000 and 1:5000.⁵ Reports now indicate there may be roughly equal numbers of male-to-female and female to-male transsexual people.⁶

Transgender people encounter difficulties in virtually every aspect of their lives, both in facing the substantial hostility that society associates with those who do not conform to gender norms and in coping with their own feelings of difference. Considerable verbal harassment and physical violence accompany the powerful social stigma faced by transgender people⁷ and may be accompanied by racial and ethnic discrimination⁸. Transgender people also experience dismissal from jobs, eviction from housing, and denial of services, even by police officers and medical emergency professionals..⁹ Restrooms, the most mundane of public and workplace amenities, often become sites of harassment and confrontation, with access often denied¹⁰).

Transgender and transsexual people are often denied appropriate medical and mental health care and are uniquely at risk of adverse health care outcomes.¹¹ Basic services may be denied because of ignorance about or discomfort with a transgender client. To align the physical body with the experienced sense of self, usually is an integral part of social transition away from the sex assigned at birth. Transsexuals and some other individuals require medical services (for example, hormone replacement, facial electrolysis, or surgical and other procedures, as appropriate to the individual). Despite ongoing evidence that the vast majority who access these achieve congruence and well-being¹² It is important to underscore the denial of basic health care, and also the extreme race and socioeconomic status disparities: Needs assessments in major cities show that severe marginalization and barriers to transition contribute to high rates of joblessness, and disproportionately affect people of color. Lack of employment leaves many without health insurance, and because insurance carriers often deny coverage for transgender individuals other nontransition related

services, transgender individuals often lack access to all ongoing basic health services, even when employed.
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Many transgender children and youths face harassment and violence in school environments. Those who do not feel safe or valued at school cannot reach their potential and may drop out. 14 Medical protocols exist for children whose body dysphoria may lead to severe depression and suicidality, including endocrinology intervention to prevent or delay unwanted puberty.15 There are few support resources for transgender children, their parents or surrounding social institutions, leaving transgender youth particularly vulnerable to so-called “reparative” treatments. 16

Issues Statement

Transgender people experience the stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and extreme hostility known as transphobia on a daily basis. Although gender non-conforming experience can be traced across history, and the successful social and medical transition of transsexuals is well documented since the middle of the twentieth century, it is only in recent years that this/has emerged in the public discourse. Unfortunately, most in our society have little or no understanding of the profound discomfort some may feel in trying to conform to rigid gender roles assigned to them by virtue of their physiology. Similarly, ignorance and insensitivity prevails regarding the debilitation that accompanies body dysphoria, and the damage done to those left without access to medical and social transition.

We as human beings have the responsibility to understand and appreciate the full range of differences that exist among human beings and to explore any and all prejudices that result in oppressive and unjust treatment.

Policy Statement

Staten Island Democratic Association (S.I.D.A.) recognizes that considerable diversity in gender expression and identity exists among our population.

S.I.D.A. believes that people of diverse gender- including those who are included under the transgender umbrella- should be afforded the same respect and rights as any other people.

S.I.D.A. asserts that discrimination and prejudice directed against any individuals on the basis of gender identity or gender expression, whether real or perceived, are damaging to the social, emotional, psychological, physical, and economic well-being of the affected individuals as well as society as a whole.

S.I.D.A. reaffirms a commitment to human rights and freedom and opposes all public and private discrimination on the basis of gender identity and of gender expression, whether actual or perceived, and regardless of assigned sex at birth, including denial of access to employment, housing, education, appropriate treatment in sex segregated facilities, appropriate medical care and health care coverage, appropriate identity documents, and civil marriage and all its attendant benefits, rights, and privileges.

S.I.D.A. encourages the repeal of discriminatory legislation and the passage of legislation protecting the rights, legal benefits, and privileges of people of all genders identities and expressions.

Public Awareness and Advocacy

S.I.D.A. supports efforts to provide safe and secure educational environments and promote an understanding and acceptance of self in which all youth including youth of all gender identities and expressions, may be free to express their genuine gender identity and obtain an education free from discrimination, harassment, violence and abuse.

S.I.D.A. supports development of, and participation in, coalitions with other professional associations and progressive organizations to lobby on behalf of the civil rights of all people of diverse gender expression and identity.

S.I.D.A. supports collaboration with organizations and groups supportive of the transgender community to develop programs to increase public awareness of the mistreatment and discrimination experienced by transgender people and of the contributions they make to society.

S.I.D.A. encourages the development of programs, training, and information that promotes proactive efforts to eliminate psychological, social and physical harm directed toward transgender people and to portray them accurately and compassionately.

S.I.D.A. supports the development of programs within schools and other child and youth services agencies that educate students, faculty, and staff about the range of gender diversity and the needs of transgender children and youth.

S.I.D.A. supports the creation of scientific and educational resources that inform public discussion about gender identity and gender diversity, to promote public policy development and to strengthen societal and familial attitudes and behaviors that affirm the dignity and rights of all individuals, regardless of identity or gender expression.

Legal and Political Action

S.I.D.A. advocates for increased funding for education treatment services, and research on behalf of people of diverse gender expression and gender identity.

S.I.D.A. supports the legal recognition of marriage, domestic partner, and civil unions, regardless of either the sex or gender status of the betrothed or partnered individuals.

S.I.D.A. encourages the repeal of laws and discriminatory practices that impeded individuals in their identification with, and their expression of the gender which matches their sense of themselves in all areas of the public arena, especially employment, health care, education and in housing including in custodial settings.

S.I.D.A. encourages the adoption of laws that will prohibit discrimination against, and protect the civil rights of, and preserve the access to health care and well-being of, individuals who identify with and express their gender identities, in education, housing, inheritance, health and other types of insurance, child custody, property and other areas.

S.I.D.A. acknowledges the importance of working with groups in and around the community of Staten Island to support the transgender community's development and help larger community organizations help overcome ignorance and fear of transgender people, and to move toward equality and justice.

S.I.D.A. supports the statements of both President of the United States Barack Obama and U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch in support of the transgender and non-conforming community across the country.

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