

6.20.12 GLBT Youth Commission Hearing

Governor Deval L. Patrick

GLBT Hearing - As Delivered

Gardner Auditorium, State House

Wednesday, June 20, 2012

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you to the presiding chair, all the members of the Commission, the members of the legislature, and the Administration who are here. I thank you for inviting me to testify this afternoon. I want to thank the Commission for your service, each and every one of you; you're an important partner of our Administration's and the work that we do to assure that all young people have the chance to thrive.

We are proud to be home to the very first Commission of this kind anywhere in America, you should be proud of that too. And I want to thank you, all of you current members representing twenty years of service, for those who have served on the GLBT commission.

My Administration is committed to working with the Commission to support GLBT youth. In 2010, with the support of the legislature, we enacted a landmark anti-bullying law to empower and educate students and make schools safer. Last year we launched a Safe and Successful Youth Initiative under Secretary Anderson Chase to work with specific communities affected by high levels of violence to ensure better services and the resources to respond.

Earlier this year, we signed the Gender Identity Bill to extend critical protections to transgender residents, in housing, employment, education and protection from hate crimes. We are working to assure equal accommodations for transgender students in schools and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has moved swiftly to amend regulations to protect all students regardless of their gender identity and expression. We have developed a number of community based programs at the Department of Public Health to provide support and guidance for at risk GLBT youth.

We do what we do, as a matter of conscious. It is not politics. It is not abstract policy. It is about people. No individual should face discrimination and mistreatment because of who they are. Our work is motivated by respect for basic human dignity.

I want to thank, in that spirit, Secretary Bigby and her team at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and Secretary Reville and his team at the Executive Office of Education for the diligence and dedication they bring to these efforts.

They know as well as the Commission that there is a great deal more work to do. I understand that you heard from Secretary Bigby earlier today on some of the unique challenges that GLBT youth face. It troubles me that gay, lesbian and bisexual and transgender youth are more likely to experience bullying or violence in school. It troubles me that they have higher rates of substance abuse and attempted suicide. And it troubles me that still too many people see these issues as secondary or marginal. All young people, all young people, deserve the chance to feel welcome and supported in our schools and our communities. Yes, we have more work to do.

To the members of the GLBT community here today, I want you to know that we respect you, we support you, and we are here for you in each and every way that we can be.

In that spirit, we will continue to promote healthy environments for all youth. We will continue our efforts to end violence and bullying. We will continue to encourage safe spaces where young people can receive support from caring adults. We will continue to provide health education and services to meet the needs of the GLBT population and we will continue to affirm the dignity of every human being.

I look to this commission, to the GLBT community and to the citizens everywhere to help us do the right thing. Thank you all for bringing us together and I look forward to the Commission's forthcoming report.