

Remarks

Mr. Chairman, I would like to say a few remarks about the non-discrimination legislation and shed a little light on my personal story. I am hopeful my story will help my fellow Council members think through this issues the proposed ordinance addresses. I also want to thank Dee Culp who reached out to me last October and asked how pass an ordinance in City Council. Remember Dee, I said wait for Beth and I to win and you'll have two votes to start.

The closest and the coming out story is a bond that all LGBT people share in common. The proposed ordinance we are about to discuss truly affects me. And I ask my fellow Council members to try to place yourself in my shoes. There is outright discrimination in our society and then there is the fear of discrimination.

The fear of being fired, the fear of losing your apartment, denied visitation rights at a hospital, or the fear of a dishonorable discharge from the military. Fear is very real. The closet is the embodiment of that fear. I know because for 10 long years I lived in a closet afraid to open the door. Throughout the 1980s I lived in a dark place never really trying for my two passions in life: the priesthood and politics. The door was completely slammed on those dreams at that time. I lived and still live today with pain, disappointment and discrimination. As I think back on it now - if only the climate of fear of discrimination was lifted – if only our government at the time made a statement against discrimination – where would I be now. In the 80s no one ever told me it would get better. Will & Grace was not on television, there was no gay cable channel. There certainly were not 45 out athletes at the

Olympics as there is this week. My only role model in politics was Harvey Milk, a City Commissioner in San Francisco and he was murdered in his office in City Hall. So I retreated farther into the closet – decided to go to the gym and bulk up because no one would ever think a 6'2" muscle guy was gay. I also joined the military to try and drive the gay out of me – but boy was I wrong. I even became engaged to a woman only to hurt her with my lies. And then the worst happened, my mom asked me why I was not dating girls anyone (this was when I was 26) and for some unknown reason I told the truth. I had just lost for a seat on the Philadelphia City Council. I ran for office in the closet – they most stupid thing I did in my life. But then in the 90s the climate, at least in the big cities, began to change and after my loss I slowly came started to come out. My enlistment in the National Guard was up. I was

secure in my job – I had managed a small business with two friends who were supportive and my church welcomed me with open arms. Then my mother asked the question. Are you gay? And I said yes. She stopped talking to me. I was devastated. The worse thing a parent can do is stop loving their child. But did my parents stop loving me? NO – it took a while, in my case, it was a little over year before we started to talk again. And during that time my mom took it upon herself to read everything she could about being gay and guess where she went?to the Osterhout Free Library. She did an about face and completely embraced me. My confidence sword. In 1993, I read a book called “A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society.” The book showed me how important it is to have a place at the table, to be a decision maker, to be a witness and to stand up for equality.

Please indulge me as I pay homage to the 25 years of activism of to my mother Emily who could not be here tonight or on Thursday. Just a few hours ago in the hospital my mom received the first in a series of shots in her spine which I hope and pray will help her to be able to walk again without pain. My mom has literally saved lives. In was in this very room in 1994 as she spearheaded the last time a non-discrimination ordinance was brought to this very table. Though it was defeated, she was not. As the founder of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in Northeastern Pennsylvania) she was motivated to help other parents deal with the emotional ups and downs of their children's coming out process. She founded REACH at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, a teen age support group to help with suicide prevention,; was on the first board of the Rainbow Alliance, SPARC – the State of

Pennsylvania Rights Coalition which evolved into present day Equality Pennsylvania and was an organizer of the first PrideFest which still continues on to this day. Emily with the help of her friend Jim Harrington a professor at Wilkes University fought against hate with love and help literally save the lives of John Dawe, Richard Hughes, Jake Dymond and Douglas Waiter and countless others. She told me this morning that she is proud to see her son have a place at the table.

I know it's next too impossible to legislate away people's prejudice but as St. Paul said in the Letter to the Hebrew's "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." We can hope for the assurance that people's hard hearts will be softened and discrimination of any kind will end. While we have seen progress in society our conviction is we will see more.

And I will end with a quote from my favorite president, Theodore Roosevelt

“The corner-stone of the Republic lies in our treating each man on his worth as a man, paying no heed to his creed, his birthplace, or his occupation ... asking only whether he acts decently and honorably in the various relations of his life, whether he behaves well to his family, to his neighbors, and to the state.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.