

Dear Members of the Indiana General Assembly,

February 20, 2017

It appears that a recently introduced bill that would have prevented transgender individuals from changing their birth certificates to match their true gender identity will not get a legislative hearing. This bill purportedly was offered in the interest of maintaining the accuracy of public record keeping. It is fortunate that this bill will not be considered since only an amended birth certificate would offer the means to correct the unavoidable errors in gender assignment.

Last July, a Transgender Health Conference was held at the University of Indianapolis. This conference was offered in collaboration with IU School of Medicine and Eskenazi Health, and with 300 attendees, exposed hospital administrators, health care providers, social workers, transgender individuals, as well as friends and family members of those who are trans, to the current state of knowledge in understanding what it means to be trans. Participants gained insights into how lives are positively impacted through counseling, social transitioning and appropriate medical care. Another Transgender Health Conference will be taking place at Eskenazi Hospital, in conjunction with Indiana University School of Medicine and the Office of Diversity affairs, on March 10th.

It is abundantly evident to anyone involved with transgender individuals that they suffer unimaginable challenges, which most of us would hate to have to confront. Yet also evident is that a little empathy and compassion go a long way in helping them find the peace and acceptance that we can only wish for all of our friends and family.

We have been greatly impressed by how such lives are dramatically changed for the better once these individuals (and their families) develop an understanding themselves of what it means to be trans; when they understand and accept the disconnect between their physical bodies and their gender identity; and, perhaps even more importantly, when they know that others understand them too, empathize with them, and support them non-judgmentally.

Transitioning can occur at any age. It is absolutely incredible, despite how difficult it may be to truly understand by many, to see a young child who has long suffered in a dark, gloomy, withdrawn state while lacking a vocabulary to tackle an issue they cannot explain, then blossom in a joyful and self-actualized and confident manner once they are accepted by themselves, their parents, their schools, and their friends.

Medical knowledge is constantly evolving. We now understand LGBTQ issues in ways never thought possible just a few decades ago. Hospitals and medical practices understanding of the complexities of gender identity and sexual orientation are making headway educating the medical community and offering sensitivity training to their staff. We are proud that our profession is one that can model the empathy and provide non-judgmental compassionate care consistent with evolving medical knowledge in spite of the sociopolitical polarity that exists on another level.

Progress is certainly slow in many places still, but if the public were generally aware of all that is being done behind the scenes to advance greater understanding and compassion, all would be very impressed and heartened by the efforts underway. The effort continues to increasingly offer dignity, respect, and compassion for those whose voices too frequently go unheard.

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