

New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy
24 W. 25th St., 9th floor NY, NY 10010 (212) 675-3288, ext. 338 paulinepark@earthlink.net

New York City Human Rights Initiative
Int. No. 512
public hearing
8 April 2005
testimony on behalf of NYAGRA
by Pauline Park
to the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
Hon. Bill Perkins, Councilmember and Chair

Mr. Chairman,

I am testifying today in these hearings on Int. No. 512 -- the New York City Human Rights Initiative -- on behalf of the New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy (NYAGRA), the first statewide transgender advocacy organization in New York, founded in 1998. As you know, NYAGRA worked closely with you as lead sponsor of Int. No. 24, the transgender rights bill enacted as Local Law 3 of 2002. That amendment to the New York City human rights ordinance defined 'gender' to include gender identity and expression, in order to protect transgendered and gender-variant people from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations in the five boroughs.

NYAGRA is also a founding member of the coalition that worked on behalf of the Dignity in All Schools Act (DASA), passed by the City Council in June 2004 and then enacted over the mayor's veto in September 2004. This safe schools legislation prohibits bias harassment in public and (non-religious) private schools throughout the five boroughs and is intended to address the pervasive problem of bullying in our schools. We in NYAGRA are delighted to be working with you and your office again on Int. No. 512, and I would like to take just a few minutes to elucidate some lessons from our experience with both DASA and the transgender rights law.

The lesson of the campaign for the DASA bill is that legislation that addresses multiple oppressions can engender the support of multiple communities that can work in broad coalition for passage of that legislation and implementation of it once enacted. While media coverage of DASA has sometimes focused on the effort to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students from harassment, DASA also prohibits harassment based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, family composition or circumstance, and economic circumstance, as well as sexual orientation and gender (defined to include gender identity and expression). And the DASA Coalition includes not only LGBT organizations but also non-LGBT organizations as well.

The NYC HRI also represents an effort by a broad-based coalition to make New York City government more responsive to the concerns of the many constituencies that this coalition represents, including women and people of color. As with DASA, the HRI represents an attempt to address multiple oppressions that are not simply additive, but often mutually reinforcing. To cite only the most obvious example, a woman of color may face discrimination based both on her gender and her race or ethnicity. As a transgendered woman of Asian birth, I am personally committed to legislation and policies that address such multiple oppressions, and I believe that the HRI does just that.

The lesson of the transgender rights law is that legislation can create opportunities for advocacy organizations and community-based organizations to work in cooperation with City agencies to enhance human rights and to improve access to City government. After the mayor signed the bill into law in April 2002, the Commission on Human Rights convened a working group of community members to work with Commission staff in order to draft guidelines for implementation of the new statute, and NYC CHR eventually adopted regulations in December 2004. That law -- and those regulations -- provide a model for what Int. No. 512 can do for women and people of color. I therefore urge this committee to vote for Int. No. 512, I urge the Speaker to bring this bill to the floor of the Council for a vote, and I urge the Council to pass it. Thank you.

Pauline Park, Ph.D. is co-chair of the New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy and NYAGRA representative to the Dignity in All Schools Coalition; she served as coordinator of the work group on gender-based discrimination that led the campaign for Int. No. 24 (Local Law 3 of 2002).

www.nyagra.tripod.com