

**Written Statement of
Diego Miguel Sanchez**

**To the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions
Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Room 2175
Rayburn House Office Building**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for adding my voice to those you hear today.

My name is Diego Miguel Sanchez, and I am a 51-year old transsexual Latino man. I was born female and transitioned to male. I grew up as an Army brat around the world, ending up in Augusta, Georgia, where my 80-year-old mother lives today.

When I was five, I told my parents that I was born wrong, that I felt like a boy inside. My mother showed me a magazine with Christine Jorgensen on the cover. She told me that she didn't know if there were other people like me – girls who felt like boys -- but that this woman was born a boy, felt like a girl and was able to become a woman later in life. Mom told me that by the time I grew up, it would be okay. From that time, my parents gently, privately, dually socialized me, but it was our secret, of sorts. My mom prepared me for life as girls are expected to be, and my dad taught me the lessons that boys needed to become men. It was rough – I had as many tutus as Tonka Trucks. But I could survive the former because of the latter. My parents always gave me hope, and my positive outlook on life, despite painful hardships, is the fruit of that loving labor. Mom was mostly right; it's almost okay for me these days.

I am grateful to be gainfully employed as the Director of Public Relations & External Affairs at AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts and AIDS Action Council in Washington, D.C. My college degree is in Journalism with a major in Public Relations from the University of Georgia. I am the only male Georgia letterman I know of who earned it on the women's tennis team. I was one of those Straight A, perfect attendance students. Dad always told me, "The harder you work, the luckier you get." I worked hard. I am lucky.

Because sex reassignment procedures weren't as developed in 1980 as today, I focused on work, hoping to make changes in the future. I spent nearly 20 award-winning years climbing the corporate ladder at several global companies including Coca-Cola, Burson-Marsteller, Holiday Inn, ITT Sheraton and Starwood Hotels.

I'm a loyal worker, a passionate leader and a man who had to wait, for fear of being fired, to be who I was always destined to be: Diego Miguel Sanchez, an honorable man. My career entailed navigating the newly named Glass Ceiling, probing limited opportunities for female professionals of color and trying to find a way to be a man while I looked like a woman in the workplace. It was heart-breaking and painful. But it was necessary. I did it because it was the only way I knew to save money to pay for sex reassignment, which I did later from my own savings.

I struggled with finding self-respect in a world that I never imagined would allow -- let alone accept or embrace -- someone like me, someone born seemingly wrong. I was an honest person who could be honest about everything except about me. I negotiated with my corporate colleagues for things that would moderately affirm me. It's the little things that seem like 'nothing' to others, that meant so much. It warmed my heart to

receive a tie rather than a scarf as a company talisman. I asked people to use my first initial as my first name until I could change things medically and legally.

I have lived long enough to achieve those gains because I was able to do the ONE thing that military families are ordered to do when there's a challenge: I sucked it up.

But when my head hits my pillow every night, I close my eyes and think about my friends who are transgender whose lives aren't easy. I miss my friend Alexander John Goodrum who took his own life. I feel guilty about my friend Ethan St. Pierre who lost his job just because he began his transition from female to male. I was the first transman he met, and he lost his job because he is brave and honest. It wasn't right. I still lose sleep over that injustice.

Because I work in public health, I know countless transgender people who are homeless, and I know these people by their names and character. These are good people who can't get work and whose lives are cast to the streets in large cities and small towns. It's a disgraceful injustice.

I flash my ID every day without concern. It's not questioned because I have had the luxury of personally paying to transition to male and aligning my IDs and myself. But I have friends whose licenses' and passports' gender don't match their identity, so they are disclosed as transgender the minute they show an ID, including when they try to get a job. I face these burdens when recruiting firms ask for my former names as part of their due diligence. It closes doors for me, and it limits the lives of my friends.

It's an injustice that we are ever evaluated for employment based on other people's comfort with our existence. I grew up in the South, where I wasn't allowed to swim in public pools because I'm not white. This experience today feels like a flashback.

I am before you today to affirm that transgender and transsexual people, including me, are equally human and deserve to be treated like other people. Thank you.