

# **Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, D.C.**

P.O. Box 75265, Washington, DC 20013

www.glaa.org

## **Testimony on Bill 21-0444, "Death Certificate Gender Identity Recognition Amendment Act of 2015"**

D.C. Council Committee on Judiciary

December 10, 2015

Dear Chairman McDuffie,

Please accept this as testimony for the record by the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance, which has fought for LGBT equality in the District since 1971.

We support Bill 21-444, the Death Certificate Gender Identity Recognition Amendment Act of 2015. It amends the Vital Records Act of 1981 to clarify the process for respecting people's gender identity on their death certificates. We thank Councilmember Mary Cheh for introducing it, and Councilmembers Evans, Silverman, Grosso, Bonds, Allen, Orange, Alexander, and Nadeau for co-sponsoring.

As the bill summary states in part, "The decedent's gender identity shall be reported by the next of kin or the best qualified person available unless a document that memorializes the decedent's gender transition is presented to the person completing the death certificate. It allows an individual with rights to the decedent's remains to file a petition in Superior Court for determining gender identity. It also protects the person completing the death certificate from liability for damages or costs for how they enter the decedent's gender."

This bill clarifies the District's intent in adding "gender identity or expression" to the D.C. Human Rights Act a decade ago, as it applies to death certificates.

I asked a fellow activist who is trans for her perspective. She said, "Many of us have families that only see how we were before transition and override or ignore who we really were in life. It is about honoring a person's life - as you know, there have been trans women buried in suits and their identities erased post mortem. I see that on the level of defiling a corpse."

I have indeed witnessed this defilement and disrespect myself. It recalls the outrage we saw after AIDS hit us, when many birth families rejected the chosen families of those who had died, erasing their identities and wishes in death.

Bill 21-444 is required as a matter of justice and respect. Please pass it promptly. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Rosendall  
President