

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act
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I want to begin by thanking Chairman Andrews and the members of subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to testify today about my personal experience with a kind of discrimination that, shockingly, still affects people across the country. Like so many other gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender victims of workplace discrimination, I didn't lose my job because I was lazy, incompetent or unprofessional. Quite the contrary – I worked hard and did my job well.

However, that was all discarded when my boss discovered that I am a lesbian. In a single afternoon, I went from being a highly praised employee to out of a job. The experience has been very difficult for me, as it has altered not only how I feel about the world but also, how I feel *in* the world. Work was more than work to me; it was a part of what I know about myself and how I feel about myself.. I never went to work simply to get through another day; I went to work to be a rock star.

How I feel today is vastly different. Up until a month ago, I had not been employed full-time since the summer of 2006. For a few hours a week I did the bookkeeping and taxes for my father's small business. Working part-time and earning less than half the money I had still felt better than an atmosphere of contempt

Cellular Sales of Texas hired me in March of 2006 for the position of inventory control manager. I was responsible for all stores throughout Texas and Oklahoma. My job was a position of trust – keeping track of valuable, and frequently stolen, electronics. I was excited to take on a position of such importance and responsibility. I spent hours, even before the workday started, implementing a control system to help the store manage its inventory. I was frequently praised by my supervisor for my dedication, and quickly received a raise for my job performance.

But there was a negative side to my workplace, a side that kept me, an otherwise open lesbian, from being honest about myself with my co-workers. It wasn't long before I began to hear male coworkers making jokes and other derogatory comments about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. A fellow female employee told me my walk was "not too feminine". I did not want to create problems in a new job, so, in conversation, I tried to stay engaged while carefully avoiding all pronouns, in particular, "she." I spoke very generally, never using my girlfriend's name. Instead I said things like, "my better half."

But that was not enough to keep my sexual orientation from costing me my job. Ironically, my own cell phone proved to be the problem. Like many people, I had a photo of me and my girlfriend –sharing a midnight kiss at a New Year's Eve party— saved as my cell phone screensaver. One day in May 2006, my manager came into the back office to ask me a question. I was across the room sending a fax, but my manager

stopped by my desk, noticing my cell phone sitting on it. Out of what I can only imagine was innocent curiosity, she opened my phone and then exclaimed “Oh my!” I turned and looked at her. She didn’t even make eye contact before snapping my phone shut, tossing it back on my desk and rushing back to her office. She avoided me for the rest of the day, but I overheard her tell a coworker that she “knew there was something off” about me.

I dreaded coming to work the next day and, to my dismay, my manager was already there, three hours earlier than she usually arrived. As I passed her office door, she called me in, stood up and, without the slightest hesitation, told me that “she was going to have to let me go.” When I asked why, she told me that they needed someone more “dependable” in the position. I was shocked – I had arrived at work an hour early every day for weeks, not only implementing a brand new inventory system, but programming it and drafting instructions on how to use the software. When I defended myself, she simply repeated, “I’m sorry, we just need to let you go.”

I realize a law still won’t change the way some people, like my former employer, feel about other people or certain issues. However, there is a sense of security, knowing that other hardworking Americans like me are protected under law from situations like this happening again. I do not believe that anyone should be exposed to a workplace where they have to worry that simply and honestly being who they are could cost them their livelihood. Congress has the power to help stop the devastating effects of discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Please, pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.