

**Written Statement of
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To the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions

Committee on Education and Labor

United States House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Sabrina Marcus Taraboletti. I am the parent of two beautiful children who I love, and who in turn, love me. And I am a transgender woman.

I grew up in a very conservative, traditional, middle class, Italian Catholic family in Pelham, New York. We were a close, loving family much like you'd see in the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding."

After high school, I attended SUNY Maritime College, one of the country's premier Merchant Marine Academies, and graduated with a degree in engineering and a Coast Guard license to be an officer in the Merchant Marine.

Shortly after college, I moved to Florida to work on the space shuttle, at the Kennedy Space Center. It was a dream come true. Most who know me will share that I am passionate about the space program and honored to be part of its history. After 20 years of service my final

employer was United Space Alliance, the prime contractor of the Shuttle program. So what happened to my dream job?

In 2003, I was summarily fired six weeks after announcing that I would be changing my sex from male to female. After assigning security personnel to follow my every move, charges were drummed up, and I was suspended without pay pending a board hearing for dismissal. I was escorted off the space center grounds and told not to return. I was told the actions were the result of an investigation initiated by an anonymous hotline call.

To my knowledge, I was the fourth person attempting transition at the space center while trying to keep their job. The first three before me also failed.

The first woman was a union machinist who worked in the Launch Equipment Shop. After leaving she informed me that during her transition she received no support and her work environment was purposefully made very uncomfortable. She was jeered at and made fun of. She could no longer take the harassment and left the center to find work elsewhere.

The second woman received similar pressure but was a bit more of a fighter. They decided to deal with her by moving her to second shift. She was left isolated without any other coworkers, given little work to do, and was ignored. They isolated her and waited for her to make mistakes. She did and she was fired.

The last woman was a Launch Pad technician who worked at the center for many years. All on her own, and without any education, she transitioned on the job and met with all the jeering and hardships we all face, but without any of the support. Without the education and support of her community, or an educated employer, she was alone. She fell into a deep depression and took her own life, an all too common occurrence.

The reason for our failure is that there were no formal transgender policies or procedures at the space center. They had no policies because no laws at the state or federal level required them to. My future, therefore, was left up to the interpretation of people who have no education in transgender issues or needs. Worse yet, no one really cared or wanted to learn, even though I made a diligent effort to educate them.

I cannot tell you how meaningless life feels when an event like this happens. I didn't know where to turn or what future I had. I was humiliated. I was fired. After 20 years of service, I received no severance pay nor was I allowed to collect unemployment. I have had to tell future potential employers I was dismissed; it has made finding new employment impossible, especially in the small space community of Brevard County.

What is even more troubling is that I anticipated the possibility of my job loss and worked furiously to avoid it. I reached out to my management, my coworkers, HR, and even the associate administrator of EEO for NASA. I even applied internally for jobs with my employer at different work locations, but there was no help from any level.

Four years later, after submitting what seems like hundreds of applications, I have not been able to find a new position in the space program, which is not only the field I love, but is one of the few industries in my area where an engineer like me could find a job.

There are those who believe that being transgender is a life style or a choice. Personally I have lost my wife, most of my assets, and my home in divorce. I have been abandoned by half of my family and friends. At the same time, I had to find the \$70-90,000 of funding and endure the extreme pain of electrolysis, and the various other surgeries required to complete the transition from male to female. All this while trying to stay employed! Believe me, no one wakes up one morning and thinks, "Hey, I think I'm going to change my sex today." No one

says “You know, living with all that discrimination and hatred won’t be that bad after all.” Being transgender is something you are born with and simply have to deal with the best way you can.

There is more to my life than just my profession. During my time at the space center, I married and, after 14 years, divorced. I have 2 children. I am their Father; something I assured them would never change. My relationship with my children is very strong and I am active in both their academic and personal lives. My daughter, 19, presently lives with me. She attends the University of Central Florida on a full Chemistry Scholarship. My son, 17, is still in High School, but recently was accepted to attend as a cadet at my Alma Matter.

But my family is not really separate from my job. My economic security obviously impacts them. My feeling of worth also impacts them. So when I face discrimination, my family faces it too. What happens to me because I am transgender also happens to them not only because they love me, but because I still provide for them. How I am treated is how they are treated as well.

I am a good engineer. I am a good parent and I am a good person. I practice my faith and honor my country. I do not deserve the job discrimination that I faced. People should be judged by the quality of their work, by the quality of their character. So many of us face what I have faced. Many more are preparing to face it in the future. It needs to stop.