

**Written Testimony of Diego Miguel Sanchez, APR, for PFLAG National to
The House Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on The Equality Act of 2019
Submitted April 12, 2019**

My name is Diego Sanchez, an openly Latino transman, and I submit this testimony to proudly represent the fierce families of PFLAG! With over 400 chapters across the U.S., our hundreds of thousands of members and supporters know that all of their loved ones, including their LGBTQ+ loved ones, should be treated fairly and equally.

For me, though, this is personal as well as professional.

And the first time I talked about the personal part publicly was at the Equality Act's news conference at the House Triangle on April 1, 2019, the day before the historic hearing in the House Judiciary Committee. The experience of my story is still painful, ... raw ... and real.

Long before I was the first openly transgender senior staffer on Capitol Hill, serving as Congressman Barney Frank's Senior Policy Advisor, I was a highly accomplished and award-winning public relations and diversity management executive.

Years ago, I served as the Global Vice President of Diversity & Communications at Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide. When I overtly disclosed that I was transgender, I was told by my boss, "We can't have people like you, transgender people, working here."

That I had just created the company's award-winning fully inclusive Global Diversity Plan added insult to deep injury.

Due to my disclosure, I suffered direct, explicit workplace discrimination ... for months ... and not too long after, I was fired from my job. My firing placed my family — my mother — at immediate risk.

You see, I was the sole provider for my mother at that time, responsible for her health and financial well being.

And the only thing more distressing than having someone take away from me the decades-long career I loved — solely due to their lack of education and personal discomfort — was having to tell my mother I'd been fired.

I made clear to her that:

- I didn't do anything wrong -- in fact, I excelled at my job;**
- I lost my job because of my gender identity,**
- I didn't know how much I could help her stay alive, housed, fed and well; and**
- I didn't know how long it would take to give her HER life back, as I had always promised I would protect her, no matter what.**

Some have said, "Why did you say anything? Why couldn't you just shut up?" I say, "How could I have?"

When I hear of the experiences PFLAGers have had—PFLAGers like PFLAG National Regional Director Amy Adams, whose trans daughter was left

unprotected during an active shooter drill at her school, I know I did the right thing.

And there are silver linings:

- **I created new career paths, and have served communities and the public well;**

- **Mom's last years were peaceful, happy, safe, and loving; and**

- **Starwood improved after I left. Today, it is part of Marriott Hotels Worldwide, a PFLAG National partner and an award-winning inclusive global hospitality leader.**

Now, we need one more silver lining: To get the Equality Act through Committees, to the Floor for a vote, and passed.

I, and hundreds of thousands of proud PFLAG parents, families, and allies, will be fighting in every zip code across the country to get this done.

Equality starts with me!