Not Enough

This edited excerpt of an opinion piece titled “When Visibility Is Not Enough,” by Kris Hayahsi, executive director of the Transgender Law Center, explores the social, economic and health inequities trans people continue to face.

May 8, 2015 By Kris Hayashi

The transgender movement is more visible now than ever. Still, the heightened recognition has not translated into an increase in acceptance or a reduction in violence. Two new reports highlight the discrimination and inequities.

“Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for Being Transgender in America” details the economic insecurities that leave many trans people in unemployment and poverty.

Trans people in the United States face financial penalties simply because they are transgender. They are economically vulnerable because of two primary failures of law: Pervasive discrimination and a lack of legal protections mean that trans people struggle to find work and safe housing, make less on the job and have higher out-of-pocket medical costs than their non-trans peers.

Failure to adequately protect trans students means that trans people and their families often face hostile, unsafe or unwelcoming school environments. Harassment, bullying and violence make it difficult, if not impossible, for trans students to obtain the skills and education they need to succeed.

“Understanding Issues Facing Transgender Americans” provides an overview of issues facing trans people in the United States, including:

Violence: According to the 2013 hate violence report from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, trans people were much more likely to experience threats, intimidation, harassment, discrimination and sexual violence. The report found that trans women and trans people of color are much more vulnerable to violence. In 2013, more than half of LGBT homicide victims were trans women of color.

Suicide Risk: Forty-one percent of respondents to the National Trans-gender Discrimination Survey reported having attempted suicide. Those who were bullied, harassed, assaulted or expelled because they were trans or gender nonconforming in school reported elevated levels of suicide attempts (51 percent).

Homelessness and Discrimination in Housing: One in five trans people have experienced homelessness because of discrimination or family rejection. They also face discrimination from agencies that should be helping them, with nearly one in three (29 percent) reporting being turned away from a shelter. One in five trans people (19 percent) in the United States have been refused a home or apartment, and more than one in 10 (11 percent) have been evicted because of their gender identity.

Health: Discriminatory health care exclusions and unequal access to health care deny trans people coverage for medically necessary care, including hormone therapy, counseling and other transition-related care. Even when trans people have full health insurance coverage, however, they often face discrimination by health care providers.

HIV/AIDS: Trans people, especially trans women of color, are at high risk for HIV. One in four black trans people in the United States have HIV/AIDS. Discrimi-nation, stigma, social isolation and bias among health and social service providers, and a lack of targeted prevention efforts, have all contributed.

Discrimination in Public: In a 2014 study in Massachusetts, 65 percent of trans people reported discrimination in public accommodation in the past 12 months. Public bathrooms were places of frequent, sometimes serious harassment and abuse. Only 17 states and the District of Columbia prohibit such discrimination over gender identity, covering 36 percent of Americans.

Identity Documents: Official documents, like driver’s licenses, birth certificates, Social Security accounts and passports, that do not match a trans person’s gender presentation can obstruct employment and travel, as well as expose them to harassment, violence, refusal of service and job loss.

As we keep advancing, we must continue to enact more needed protections and societal changes.

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