

Stella Keating's Opening Statement

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Good morning. My name is Stella Keating and my pronouns are she/her. I want to start by thanking Chair Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, their staff and the committee for the opportunity to speak to you today.

It's the honor of my lifetime to be here.

I am 16 years old, and I live in the state of Washington. I am a sophomore in high school and just got my driver's license which was a great day!

Like all teenagers, I have lots of interests and the list continues to grow. I'm into hiking, playing chess, and the ukulele. I love history, and one of my goals is to become a civil rights attorney.

A couple of months ago, I started my first part-time job. And, if you ask my parents, I spend too much time on my phone.

Speaking of my parents, they are right here next to me.

My mom, Lisa, is on our school board and has spent years running a program on youth leadership for our elementary schools. My dad, Dmitri, is a small business owner. He's owned a local bicycle company for 25 years. One of his biggest passions is to help anybody who wants to ride a bicycle, have the opportunity to do that.

Both have taught me the value of hard work, how important it is to be respectful, the responsibility we have to give back to our community, and be of service to others.

I mentioned before that it's the honor of my lifetime to be here.

Ever since I was in 4th grade, I have been drawn to politics. When I was 9 years old, I testified before my school board for more innovative programs in my elementary school. I remember I actually had to stand on my toes to get to the microphone.

But I didn't care, because I saw that I was making an impact. Even though I was only 9 years old, they cared what a little kid had to say.

Everything that I've done since then has focused on positive change. And that's what led me to become part of a movement I helped launch 3 years ago called The GenderCool Project. GenderCool has a super simple mission: Help replace opinions with real experiences meeting transgender and non-binary youth who are thriving.

So I'd like to introduce myself again. Hi. I'm Stella. And I'm transgender.

I am here before you today, representing the hundreds of thousands of kids just like me who are supported and loved by their family, friends and communities across the country.

Now I want to share with you why the Equality Act is so important. Through GenderCool, I've traveled across the country, both in person and more recently virtually, with 16 of my peers. We've been able to speak in front of thousands of people in the corporate world and millions more through the media.

I'm humbled by how some of the biggest companies on the planet are lifting up our voices and listening so that they can become places where all young people, like me, want to work. They recognize that we are the nextgen workforce. They want to attract the best talent, and they know that my generation is creating a country where everyone belongs.

But that's the good news and here's where things fall apart.

Right now, I live in a state where I have equal protection under the law. And as a high-school sophomore, I'm starting to look at colleges.

And all I can think about is this: less than half of the states in our country provide equal protection for me under the law.

What happens if I want to attend college in a state that doesn't protect me? Right now, I could be denied medical care or be evicted for simply being transgender in many states. How is that even right? How is that even American?

What if I'm offered a dream job in a state where I can be discriminated against? Even if my employer is supportive, I still have to live somewhere. Eat in restaurants. Have a doctor.

And why am I having to worry about all of this at the age of 16?

This is the United States of America. The country that I love. Every young person ... every person ... regardless of who they are or who they love, should be able to be excited about their future.

I have big goals for mine. In addition to becoming a civil rights attorney, I'm determined to run for public office.

I represent America's future. We are the next generation of small business owners. Software engineers. Scientists. Teachers. Nurses. Presidents.

And for my generation to achieve all that we will, we just need to be able to live our lives.

In closing, you've just spent some time with me. You've learned about my dreams. My values. My dedication to hard work, to respecting others, even those who don't believe I should have the same rights as all young people.

I hope that our time together has helped show you why passing the Equality Act will have such a significant, positive impact not only on the lives of kids like me but on the future of our country.

Thank you Ranking Member Grassley and all of the members for providing me this historic opportunity to speak.

Chair Durbin, I would **personally** like to thank you for **trusting in me** to represent the voices of the millions of youth across our nation ready to lead.

Thank you.

