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Stepping Up and Out

Kylar Broadus, JD '88, becomes the first openly transgender person to testify before the U.S. Senate.

Story by Kelsey Allen

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When Kylar Broadus, JD '88, of Columbia, was in law school at the University of Missouri, all he wanted to do was graduate, work for a large corporation, have a family and pay his bills on time. He never imagined that he would be the first transgender person to testify before the U.S. Senate. On June 12, at the request of Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, Broadus took the stand to speak in support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would provide protection for transgender citizens.



Kylar Broadus, JD '88, of St. Louis, was the first transgender person to testify before the U.S. Senate in support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Photo by Nicholas Benner.

Broadus' experience with both the law and employment discrimination made him the perfect voice for this movement to prohibit discrimination based on sex or gender. One of Broadus' jobs after law school, prior to his female-to-male transition, was at a large financial institution. Broadus says he had always dressed male, but when he entered the workforce, he initially wore skirts with pantyhose. As Broadus grew uncomfortable living as a female, he started dressing like a man again and wearing a male hairstyle. He also had surgeries to change from female to male and officially changed his documentation to finalize the legal transition. Within six months, Broadus says he was "constructively discharged" from his position. Until the day he was forced out of the company, Broadus testified, his supervisor harassed him, and the workplace discrimination he faced as a trans person was "devastating, demeaning and demoralizing."

"Being transgendered, you have to put on a badge of courage every day, like a knight in armor," Broadus says.

Since his departure from corporate America, Broadus has become a professor of business law at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Mo., joined the National Black Justice Coalition board and founded the Transgender Law and Policy Institute as well as the Trans People of Color Coalition (TPOCC).

He started the TPOCC in 2010 after observing that black and other people of color in the trans community were being marginalized. “What I was seeing was that the transgender community is indicative of our society as a whole,” Broadus says. “We’d form organizations and entities, and the same dynamics would play out in those entities as those in mainstream America. People of color were being left behind.”

A recent study, “Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey,” found that 34 percent of black trans people have a household income of less than \$10,000 a year, which is more than twice the rate for all transgender people (15 percent) and more than eight times the rate for the general population (4 percent). “We, as people of color, are even more disproportionately impacted because you have the intersection of gender and race,” Broadus says.

An activist for all injustices, Broadus says it was never his intention to become the face for the transgender movement, though he is clearly impassioned by the cause. His goal is to see the passage of the ENDA and to continue fighting for equality. “It’s about opening minds and changing hearts,” Broadus says. “We get so closed that we fail to respect other human beings. I am hoping that people will educate themselves. We’re

not asking for any special treatment. We are just asking for the same treatment.”

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