00:05

Host: Hello, everyone. I'm Dashae Engler and this is A Dignified Life podcast. In this episode I'll be talking to a trans woman who lives in Illinois but receives gender-affirming care in Iowa. We'll be getting into her story in a little bit. But first, I want to take a moment to talk about the trans panic defense, because it was cut from the episode and it was something she was concerned about.

This is one of many examples of what trans people go through. And if they don't go through it, it's a fear that they have that could possibly become their reality. The trans panic defense is a legal tactic used to argue that someone's violent actions is justified after figuring out someone's gender identity. Although this defense is banned in Illinois, it is not banned in the governing state where she receives gender affirming care. Iowa.

Iowa has a very interesting history politically. This former swing state is becoming more and more conservative. But we'll talk about Iowa in the next episode. The trans panic defense is important to highlight because although Johnson is protected in the state she lives in, when she travels she falls vulnerable to whatever laws that state does and doesn't have, showing the importance of Illinois setting a standard for all states.

When talking to Johnson, we discussed her journey and how she found her own agency. Let's get into her story.

1:10

Host: Hi, Lily. How are you today?

1:21

Guest: Hi. I'm good. Good to be here.

1:25

Host: Yeah. So can you kind of tell me a little bit about, like, your gender affirming care, like how it started? It's like you live in Illinois, but then you also get gender affirming care in Iowa, correct?

01:42

Guest: Yes. So my psychiatrist went to the University of Iowa and she knew we were very, very good at what they did. So some endocrinologists at the University of Iowa Children's Hospital, because at the time I was seeking gender affirming care. I was under the age of 18. My parents are both super supportive and my mom really wanted me to have the best care there was.

She wanted to not just find what was convenient, but find what was what would be, you know, highly recommended. It was interesting. We took a while to get the first appointment set up. I mean, it's a 3 hours drive and the first appointment actually got canceled because of Iowa State Law. Like, right before I was about to get care, so I had to wait another few months until I turned 18. Luckily, I was close to turning 18, so it wasn't a huge issue for me, but it affected a lot of their patients.

They basically weren't able to take any new patients, but they could still see current patients and they were able to take new patients who are over the age of 18. And I was able to get prescribed, you know, hormone treatment. And I'm 20 now. I've been doing that for two years at this point, almost three.

And they're right now with how things are in the world. If any federal law changes, there's a very good chance that Iowa will cave long before Illinois does. And Illinois will likely have to move our care to Illinois. It'll be a shame to have to move if that happens. But I mean, I have a lot of friends who are getting gender affirming care around here in Illinois. I know that there are good places, and obviously, if I'm lucky enough that there are options, but it's more of you wanting to stay where the people know you.

03:43

Host: You've been going on this journey with them. And that's kind of like why you're fighting hard to stay in Iowa.

03:55

Guest: Yeah, they've been absolutely wonderful. I mean, it's a three hour drive and they're like, you know, a six hour round trip. The way that they've handled anything ever going wrong is just perfect. They gave us gas station gift cards to, like, pay for gas for the gas of driving up there for these appointments.

It was a wild time. But I think, you know, that's the kind of, you know, wonderful care you can expect somewhere as acclaimed as they are. And they're really I mean, they're taking the current legislation hard. You know, it's a hard hit, but I mean, they're still doing as much work as they can as they're allowed to.

04:59

Host: So I kind of wanted to switch gears a little bit. Yeah. And to talk about, like you as a person, like in your childhood, what was an informative moment that you still think about today?

05:22

Guest: I mean, the interesting thing is, is, you know, I didn't really realize I was trans until I hit puberty and, like, it felt wrong. The incorrect puberty and the dysphoria and the just the depression and all of it was just weighing on me. And it was obvious that there was something

that needed to change. But, you know, before that, when I was a little kid, I think there were little signs that were really obvious at that moment. But looking back, it's like, that was definitely something going on.

I remember my dad complaining about being able to like being unable to grow facial hair, and I thought to myself, like, yeah, I hope that's how I am. I would hate to grow facial hair and just being absolutely disgusted by the idea of growing facial hair when I was in elementary school, like, I always, like all of the friends I made were girls.

And then in middle school I just, you know, I had a friend group of boys that my like cousin made and I joined them and I felt weird and I was missing when I was hanging out with my girlfriends. So it's like little things like that. I mean, there was the way that I perceived the person that I would grow up into was like I imagined them was very nebulous.

Like I was unable to really see myself growing up into a man. People ask, How long have you known? It was like, Well, I mean, since I was like 14, but really I knew something was up a long time before that. I just didn't know what it was until I had the language of knowing what being transgender is, is necessary for, for, for me to even realize something going on. I don't think I would have been able to say I'm a girl. It was just something wrong and it feels bad.

And then learning that, you know, being transgender is a thing. Thinking about it like that, that's what it is. It's all the masculine features that make me feel sick to my stomach and disconnected from my body. And if I was just a girl everyth, it would all that would go away. And you feel like you're the woman you want to be today. I think that I've got a long way to go, but I'm happy with the progress that I've made. I'm, you know, two years on HRT and I've got the rest of my life ahead of me.

I mean, even if I was on a normal schedule for puberty, I would know, you're not really your body isn't really fully developed after two years of puberty. So, yeah, I think the biggest thing that still bothers me, ironically, for a podcast is my voice. I'm a singer, so I like my ability to sing, but it's just, you know, the timbre of my voice that the range that it said, yeah, I don't know. It doesn't feel it feels it feels off and there's, you know, voice training and plenty of things I can do. HRT won't change my voice.

But, you know, that's part of why getting gender affirming care so young is important. If you are before you hit puberty and you realize that you're trans or even if you think you might be trans, there you can take puberty blockers, which are a way to extend that time.

You have to make a decision because regardless of what decision you make, you are making a decision you can have because your body needs the hormones to live. You have to have testosterone or you have to have estrogen. And I was in a really bad place after hitting puberty. And I, I puberty blockers would have changed my life for the better.

And there are a lot of people who don't make it through puberty, a lot of trans people who don't make it to the point where they can feel good about themselves and puberty blockers literally save their lives. It is life saving care. You know, there's a lot of the rhetoric of like, mutilating

children. That's not what's happening. You never get surgery early on. It's impossible to get surgery at a young age. You have to be above a certain age. You have to go through a crazy, extensive process that takes, you know, months of informed consent, of being told like, this is what's going to happen. Are you sure you want this? And you have to be above an age of consent and you have to get, you know, letters from psychiatrists and therapists and puberty blockers are something that you can take.

And if you realize that you're not trans, that it was something else that was going on, you can stop taking them and go through puberty and be fine. You know, there's never, there's plenty of things set in place to, to, to, to be like, are you sure figuring out that you are trans is a process that is deeply personal and takes a long time. A lot of introspection and talking with therapists and learning about what this means, what the process is that you can go through and just a lot of introspection and giving people the time to make that decision is huge.

11:49

AD

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AD

12:29

Host: I wonder too like for you specifically, is there any respectability politics to feel like you have to here being a trans woman?

12:37

Guest: I mean there was, you know, there was always an impulse of being like, I want to be, you know, confident and independent and not care what anybody thinks. And that's hard to do when you feel like if someone sees you a certain way or hears your voice while you're in the bathroom, they could get violent, it could get dangerous.

It is I, I, you know, on my college campus, there's a lot of trans people. There's a lot of pro trans stuff. There's also a lot of anti-trans stuff. There's a lot of chalk drawings. You'll walk over things that are sort of battling forces of people, drawing trans flags and trying to say things like trans rights, trans pride, and then people coming in and crossing that out and spewing hateful messages.

And the thought that just using the bathroom in public could get me hurt even in a place like Illinois. I mean, it's terrifying. It's terrifying going into a bathroom. I, you know, Well, refuse to talk even if somebody goes like, hi, I'll be like, you know, I don't think trans people should need to

pass as their gender. And I think that we as a society should open up our understanding of what is a woman, what is a man, that women can have voices, even cis women will have deep voices.

I mean, this stuff doesn't just hurt trans people, but it's hard to know, you can say we shouldn't need to pass, we shouldn't need to pass. But right now they're in a lot of ways it's so dangerous to be seen visibly as trans. And what's scary is that what this legislation does and what these people want is for us to be invisible. Even if we transition. They don't want it to be obvious that we've transitioned. They want to, you know, define trans people out of existence, make it, you know, if if people know a trans person and they see their struggle, they are more likely to get it and to not vote for these people who are who are saying these anti-trans stuff.

And so, you know, being visibly trans and saying you're trans, even if you pass, is important, but it's also so dangerous. And that's the risk. You know, that's the danger every day. And. Right now, I, I, I get called, sir, a lot. I get called he even by people who I've told I'm trans just because it's instinctive they don't see me as a woman.

15:28

Host: How does that make you feel?

15:34

Guest: I mean bad but also like I, I know that that will change. I know that there's things I can do to change that. It doesn't feel hopeless. If it felt hopeless, I think I would feel pretty awful. I feel pretty awful. I mean, that's how it felt for a while when I was 14 and it was not good.

15:52

Host: It'll change because of your gender affirming care.

16:16

Guest: Yeah, because. Because I am receiving this care. Even if, you know, Iowa state legislation changes and we need to move to Illinois. Living in Illinois is, you know, it is a safe place here. And I know a lot of people who are moving to Illinois or are considering moving to Illinois.

It's really nice to know that, like Illinois, it will be a safe place for a long time. And I worry for people who don't live in Illinois, who are unable to move to somewhere like Illinois. As far as something like anti-trans legislation is not even close to being passed here. Currently. I know that as far as bathroom laws of which bathroom you are legally allowed to use, only a couple states actually have laws about that.

17:04

Guest: The main one is Florida, which has actually passed a bunch of legislation, but like almost half of the states actually have like this legislation and process of like trying to be passed. People are trying to push for this. Iowa is one of the states that has had a bathroom bill like proposed multiple times and something like that.

You know, it would just make it less safe to use the bathroom because, you know, these laws, they they're not going to have people standing outside the door checking what what what your body looks like, checking you, making sure taking I don't know, blood levels of your your estrogen to see if you're allowed in the bathroom.

However, if somebody in the bathroom decides that you shouldn't be in there, this legislation would allow them to have the right to, like, call the cops on you. They will try to give examples of cases like men pretending to be women to go into women's restrooms and sexually harass people or whatever. That stuff is still illegal. All those people get arrested. The problem is not that people are allowed to enter the bathroom because people aren't allowed to sexually assault people. That's just that's illegal.

This legislation doesn't protect people from that. That's all it does is make it more dangerous for trans people. What kind of gives you that hope or their resilience? Like, is it like what you said earlier with the like, you know, it's not going to be for long? Yeah, I mean, a lot of everybody has interacted with a trans person at some point, even if they didn't realize it. And a lot of people as as stuff like this progresses, if if if trans people are allowed to be out more or even just, you know, encouraged by like if there is a bubble of safety at all, I mean, we saw it with the like the passing of like gay marriage where like bunch of people were like anti gay and then learned that there, you know, brother in law is gay and that changes people's minds.

You know, you can be anti trans until your kid tells you that they would rather die than be a boy. And you're not going to tell your kid they should die. They're you're just not. And once you see how much happier it makes them to be allowed to be a girl, that kind of thing changes people's minds.

And that's why the legislatures want us to be invisible. And I just don't think that's possible. One way or another. It will change eventually. The scary part is, how long is that going to last? How long am I going to be safe? Will there be a point at which I am not safe? I mean, we are genuinely, you know, looking into whether Illinois will be safe for a long time. But they might not be. Yeah. Yeah.

And, and you know, my dad has genuinely been making plans like if we need to flee the country, if we need to go to Canada, here's what we'll do. We have, you know, this step, this step, this step, this step and I don't know. I mean, it's crazy to be living in a world where that is a threat and things are looking dire sometimes.

But there's hope all over the place. Places like Illinois, places like New York are standing by their citizens and being like, here, we're not compromising on this. We will not allow this legislation to

be passed. And that's hopeful. And if that lasts, which it looks like it might, you know, other places will join in.

It's hard to vilify trans people because you have to lie to vilify trans people. Looking into it at all reveals the truth, which is that we're just people who want to exist.

21:41

Host: Thank you so much for listening to my second podcast. I hope you learned something new. Although the trans experience is not a monolithic one, we appreciate Johnson for sharing her story. Let's keep an open mind, stay learning and love each other. I'm Dashae Engler and this is Urban Plains.