

# Catholic Bishops Stopped My Surgery Because I'm Transgender

By Oliver Knight

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**After years of working to affirm my identity in a world where transgender people are questioned constantly about their decisions, I felt hopeful as I arrived for the surgery I had waited so long for. I was 27, and I would finally be closer to calling my body home.**

Since I was a kid, I've felt like my body didn't match my soul. I felt uncomfortable in clothes. I felt disgusting when I showered. Everything felt wrong, but it took me a while to figure out why.

Once I discovered that I am a man, I went to my doctor to start the process of medically transitioning. I began taking testosterone. I had a double mastectomy. The next step was a hysterectomy.

My surgery was scheduled for Aug. 30, 2017, at St. Joseph Hospital in Eureka, California. It's the only hospital in the area, and I was so excited that my community offered transgender care. I could get the operation close to home and then recover with my loved ones.

I had a pre-op appointment on Aug. 24 that went smoothly, and I followed all the instructions to prepare for my surgery.

On Aug. 30, I arrived at the hospital and they checked me in and did the surgery prep, which was extremely uncomfortable and triggering. I was given a pink gown. I asked the nurse if I could have a blue gown, but she told me I was having a "female surgery" and should wear the pink. I felt like a child all over again, sitting uncomfortably in a pink dress. But I forced myself to do it, I had been waiting so long for this.

They hooked me up to an IV to get ready to put me to sleep. About an hour after waiting, my surgeon finally came to get me. But when I saw the look on his face, I got a terrible feeling. He told me my surgery was canceled. It was denied by the Catholic Church for ethical reasons. I didn't understand how this could be happening. The Catholic bishops didn't approve of my surgery. It seemed unreal.

I had an anxiety attack and thought about all the pre-op and mental preparedness I had to go through just to get here. I freaked out and started crying. I was given medication to calm me down.

Fifteen minutes after that, the hospital staff asked me to leave. I still had booties on my feet as a nurse led me outside. I felt humiliated and queasy as I sat on the curb waiting for my roommate to pick me up.

It seems the hospital does not understand how it feels to be treated inhumanely just because your body parts do not match your soul. This surgery was important — it was meant to balance my hormones. The delay disrupted my life. I felt like the hospital's bigotry had set me back years.

Today, with the help of the ACLU, I filed a lawsuit. It's unfair for St. Joseph to deny me care because I'm a transgender man. I should be able to go to the hospital where I live. Life in Humboldt County has been tough enough. Everyone thinks it's a liberal place, but it's not for trans people. I am regularly harassed and called names.

I didn't expect discrimination from a hospital. The sting from the rejection remains, but I hope my story lets others know that this is unacceptable. And we should continue to fight until we are all treated fairly. No one should be denied health care because of who they are.

