

Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition



Date: January 30, 2019
To: Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Linthicum
and members of the Senate Education Committee
From: Julia Heffernan, Board of the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition
Re: Support for SB 52 Adi's Act

Dear Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Linthicum and members of the Senate Education Committee;

Thank you for taking into consideration Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition (OSSCC) testimony regarding SB 52: Adi's Act. Founded in 2003, the OSSCC is a 501c3 comprised of educators and advocates for safety and equity in Oregon's schools. Our work supports community efforts to reduce school based violence and harassment as well as to address youth suicide and other adverse outcomes in the historically disadvantaged and underserved gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth population in Oregon. OSSCC supports SB 52, Adi's Act to address the mental health crisis among all Oregon youth as a central concern of our coalition.

Along with ongoing educational and advocacy work, the OSSCC produces the annual Oregon Safe Schools report. This report has been highlighting school safety and public health concerns related to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth population over the past decade. The most recent report made use of *Oregon Health Authority's* survey data. The 2017 survey data indicated that among all Oregon eighth and eleventh grade youth suicidal ideation is on a continuing rise.

When responding to the bi-annual *Oregon Healthy Teens* survey question, "During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?" both middle and high school students are reporting YES with increasing frequency. ***In fact, the Oregon 2017 Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan annual report noted that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 10-24 year old Oregonians.***

The OSSCC annual report goes on to highlight that when you take into account the bullying and harassment about gender identity the suicide outcomes are considerably worse for Oregon's LGBT youth. In fact, almost half of those students who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming expressed having seriously considered suicide in 2017. And in response to the follow up question, over one quarter of LGBT youth stated that they had actually attempted suicide in the past year.

In analyzing the pervasive anti-gay bullying and harassment reported by Oregon teens we also noted that there is a similar increase in suicidal ideation and attempts by sexual minority youth (youth self-identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual). Among sexual orientation minority youth nearly half of all eighth and eleventh graders seriously considered suicide in 2017.

This alarming jump in suicidal ideation from the already deeply troubling 18% for all Oregon eleventh graders to 47% among LGBT youth is consistent with national statistics on the increased vulnerability of these students. The US Center for Disease Control found that 40% of high school students who identify as a sexual minority have seriously considered suicide (2015).

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That is why the OSSCC believes it is vital that Oregon leaders develop comprehensive responses to both the adverse environmental conditions and the ongoing mental health crisis within our school systems. Adi's Act will provide all school districts in Oregon with a model suicide prevention policy based on national best practices. In addition, all school districts will be required to have a suicide prevention policy and plan including procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention that specifically address youth at higher risk for suicide—like LGBTQ students, youth with disabilities, Native American youth, and youth experiencing homelessness.

Oregon has come a long way in our commitment to have safe and inclusive schools for all youth. And we still have a long way to go. For these reasons, Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition calls on the Oregon legislature to pass SB 52.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for this proposed legislation.

Sincerely,



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