



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

College of Education

February 3, 2021

Dear Members of the Oregon Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 52. As a professional teacher educator, I am tasked with ensuring that the educators I work with see themselves as responsible for and capable of supporting all students in K-12 public schools. Preparing them for this responsibility involves highlighting the ways particular student communities are not only underserved by schools, but consistently experience harm in the very places that are supposed to care for, protect, and educate them.

There is a dire need for a statewide education plan that specifically addresses students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or two-spirit (LGBTQ2S+), among other gender identities and sexual orientations. The most recent Oregon Safe Schools provides stark evidence that LGBTQ2S+ youth in Oregon public schools feel “unsafe, unseen, and unacknowledged.” They experience higher rates for “school bullying, school-based violence, sexual assault, absences from school, and suicidal ideation” (p. 1). These already high rates are even *more* troubling for LGBTQ2S+ youth who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, or multiracial. The harm and violence LGBTQ2S+ students experience in schools is not inevitable; it is preventable. However, this will require a comprehensive statewide intervention.

I am fortunate to be a teacher educator in the UOTeach Program. Under the leadership of Dr. Julie Heffernan, we work collectively as faculty to prepare future teachers to support LGBTQ2S+ students, including specifically identifying and addressing the racial disparities that LGBTQ2S+ students of color experience. Unfortunately, I have come across many preservice and in-service teachers throughout the state who do not feel versed in antiracist, anti-oppressive, and gender inclusive pedagogies, and who do not feel prepared to support LGBTQ2S+ students. I have also met teachers who are committed to supporting LGBTQ2S+ students, but feel unsupported by their colleagues and/or administrators in this work. Although there is important work being done in various teacher education programs and districts throughout Oregon, our state still lacks a comprehensive plan that identifies the success of LGBTQ2S+ students as a core part of educators’ shared professional responsibility, and that outlines specific educational policies and practices to support educators in upholding those responsibilities.

Passing Senate Bill 52 is a first step toward reaching the vision outlined in the Oregon Safe Schools Report: that each and every LGBTQ2S+ youth in Oregon public schools feels *safe, seen, and valued*.

Respectfully,

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