

3/20/2023

Submitter: Ruth Szilagyi, resident of Portland, Oregon

To: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB99 Letter of Support

Dear SCHS Committee Members,

As an Oregonian and an aging member of the LGBTQ+ community, I urge the committee to support and vote in favor of SB99.

My wife and I are both in our 70s. We have been together for over 45 years and are legally married. At present we are able to live independently. However, we are well aware that our physical condition could change at any time. The thought of one or both of us needing long term care is frightening. We know from experience what it can be like to deal with health care providers who either do not approve of us or who are not familiar with the LGBTQ+ community beyond what they see in the media.

There have been times when one of us was in the hospital that we lied about our relationship in order to ensure the best medical care. In a long term care facility, hiding our relationship would be difficult and damaging to both of us. We are each other's next of kin. but we have no assurances that we would be treated as a real couple.

As a volunteer with Friendly House Elder Pride Services (formerly Sage Metro Portland), I know first hand that senior living communities, including long term care facilities, are ill-prepared to support and welcome us. Our Housing Committee began seeking out LGBTQ-friendly housing, including nursing home care, in 2013. As part of the outreach, I have spoken with many managers about providing training for their staff people and about publicizing activities for LGBTQ+ Elders to their residents. While there have been a number of facilities that welcomed our recommendations and training, more often than not, I heard:

"We don't have any LGBTQ+ people here."

"We don't need training because we treat everyone the same."

"It's never come up here."

I know for a fact that there are LGBTQ+ people living in long term care who are back in the closet after years of activism because they are fearful that staff will refuse to provide them care.

In addition, they fear that other residents will ostracize or bully them. When we were young, LGBTQ+ people were labeled perverts, criminals and mentally ill. While the official medical and legal perspectives may have changed, many heterosexuals of our generation continue to believe those outdated labels.

Without a Bill of Rights, including required staff training and changes in forms and policies, the LGBTQ+ Older Adult community will remain marginalized in a setting where we are most vulnerable.

I urge you to support SB99.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ruth Szilagyi  
Portland, Oregon