



Proud members of every community!

March 20, 2023

Delivered orally

Chair Gelser-Blouin and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon LGBTQ+ Aging Coalition, thank you for your time and opportunity to testify in support of SB 99 with the -2 amendments.

My name is Liz James, my pronouns are she or they. I'm here today representing the Oregon LGBTQ+ Aging Coalition, a statewide Coalition composed of representatives from public and private organizations, adults age 50+ and others from across the state who support and are committed to improving the well-being of older LGBTQ+ Oregonians through research, education and advocacy efforts.

I hail from the beautiful Rogue Valley, am 68 years old and single, and a bit unique for my age, I've been out since I was 18. It's been quite a journey that's included being chased and beat up because of who I am, and I'm still experiencing the impacts of living through and losing many, including my best friend in 1985 and a brother in 1993 to the HIV/Aids Pandemic. I've been, and am now, in a caregiver role, including for my best friend, an older single lesbian, who died last year, and now, as a caregiver for my older sister and her wife. I share this to provide context for why this proposal is important to me, my family, friends and an untold number of older and aging LGBTQ+ adults and adults with HIV in Oregon

It's important to know Oregon will not be setting a new precedent with the passage of SB 99 as amended. Other states, and municipalities, including New Jersey, Illinois, California, Massachusetts, Washington DC, and Montgomery County, Maryland have established similar laws.

The -2 amendment has two sections and I would like to briefly go over each:

The first establishes a Commission to look at gaps in services and equity and how access can be improved. It also advances the stated goals of equity and inclusion for our state.

The second section is a long-term care bill of rights which will help provide protections from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and HIV status in long term care settings. It would as well improve access and equity to State programs and services.

This bill was developed as an outcome from the 2021 Oregon LGBTQ+ Older Adult Survey and through extensive input by stakeholders, consumers, individuals with lived experience and individuals who identify with this community. This bill has also been

under development for over a year, and again, with extensive stakeholder input. It has had a circuitous journey but we are pleased today to be here before this committee. Why is this bill needed? Because my brother, sister and her wife, my friends and I and other older and aging LGBTQ+ adults and adults with HIV in Oregonian deserve to be able to be themselves, love who they love and have safe, equitable access to care and services without the threat of discrimination, denial of services or worse - abuse. And we need to have the ability to ensure enforcement.

There is relevant data from a number of reports and surveys, including our state survey and AARP surveys. I'll share just a few stunning reasons why this bill is needed from the 2015 Justice in Aging LGBTQ adults in Long-Term Care Facilities Report:

- 89% predicted that staff would discriminate against an out LGBTQ+ person
- 53% thought that staff would neglect or abuse the out LGBTQ+ person
- 43% reported mistreatment, including verbal or physical harassment from other residents, refused admission, re-admission, discharged and other types of mistreatment.

We recognize that there are some parts of SB 99 that may need further work and I, along with other stakeholders look forward to addressing those issues and bringing this bill back for the committee for passage.

SB 99 with the -2 amendments is a first step to help Oregon's older adults be safe, recognized and protected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or HIV status.

Thank you Chair Gelser-Blouin and Members of the Committee.

Liz James
Chair, Oregon LGBTQ+ Aging Coalition