



# Administration Office Senior and Disability Services

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March 21, 2023

Senate Human Services Committee  
Re: Support for SB99 with -2 amendment

Dear Chair Gelser Blouin and Members of the Senate Human Services Committee:

As the Director of the Area Agency on Aging serving older adults and adults with disabilities in Jackson and Josephine Counties, I respectfully request the committee to support and vote in favor of **SB99 -2 amendment** and forward it to Ways and Means. Our LGBTQ+ clients and their loved ones have shared with us horrific stories of experiencing abusive, discriminatory interactions with staff in long-term care settings. The majority of these clients are income-constrained and unable to move to a different care facility, and many face a constant assault on their dignity. SB99 would create an opportunity to train staff and to empower LGBTQ+ long-term care residents to be their authentic selves without fear of reprisal or discrimination based on their gender identity, sexual orientation, or HIV status.

In 2021, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), Office of Aging and People with Disabilities, conducted the *LGBTQ+ Older Adult Survey*. A diverse group of 1,402 LGBTQ+ Oregonians aged 55 and older responded. The findings are startling, and **SB 99** is one step in addressing them. In the ODHS survey, more than two-thirds of the respondents expressed worry over where they will live, and more than 1 in 5 (21%) of those currently living in a residential setting such as senior housing, assisted living, adult foster homes, or nursing homes reported LGBTQ+ discrimination occurring in their housing. This demonstrates that where an individual lives greatly impacts how they age, the type of care they receive, and the discrimination they face.

The stories of discriminatory practices are not limited to anecdotal accounts. In 2019, Clinical Gerontologist published a report, *LGBTQ Older Adults in Long-Term Care Settings: An Integrative Review to Inform Best Practices*. This report synthesized the findings of 20 studies conducted between 2000-2019 related to caring for LGBTQ older adults in long-term settings. Findings included that LGBTQ participants fear discrimination in long-term care settings leading to the invisibility of their identities. They recognize a need for increased staff training and the importance of community networks and facility preferences. Long-term care staff have mixed experiences with inclusive practices and complex views of LGBTQ older adults. Long-term care staff experience training deficits and require more expansive modalities. The study concluded that both the LGBTQ residents and staff of long-term care facilities recommend the revision of policies to ensure all sexual orientations and gender identities are affirmed and protected within the long-term care setting. To promote equitable healthcare, the study's authors recommend staff training at all levels and communication that does not make assumptions about gender identity.

Oregon has a proven track record as a leader in equitable access, and this bill offers a unique opportunity to promote equal rights of LGBTQ+ individuals who live in long-term care settings.  
Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely yours,

The Rev. Constance S. Wilkerson, MS, MDiv  
Senior and Disability Services Director (Director, Area Agency on Aging)

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*A designated Area Agency on Aging for Jackson and Josephine Counties Providing Services to Seniors and Adults with Disabilities*