

TO: Oregon House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
FROM: Cee Bondurant
RE: Support for HB 2002

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chair Goodwin and Nelson, and Committee Members,

My name is Cee Bondurant and I have been a social worker and mental health clinician in Oregon for over 20 years. I currently work for Multnomah County as the LGBTQ+ Mental Health Consultant for youth serving programs in Behavioral Health. I am an expert on gender affirming care in my field and at the county. I provide consultation and training for clinicians, among many other roles. The demand and need for information and training around gender affirming care for youth in mental health has skyrocketed. I receive requests for training and consultation from additional divisions and departments, which I offer whenever possible. I'm not representing Multnomah county. I am writing to encourage support for HB2002 as a citizen, expert in gender affirming care for LGBTQ+ youth, and a proud transgender femme who is the parent of a 14 year old trans child.

Please bear with me, I intended to keep this concise. There is so much that feels important to say.

I want to emphasize that youth under the age of 15 cannot pursue or receive hormones or medical care without their parents' involvement and consent. This is the law in Oregon regardless of whether a child is pursuing gender affirming care or medical and mental health care of any kind.

Youth must receive a mental health assessment from their therapist before pursuing hormone therapy. There are very few youth who are seeking immediate gender affirming surgery. For those who are exploring or considering surgery, clinicians help them consider all the possibilities- including all the potential risks. Our teams work with parents and families in tandem with youth and work hard to engage with them, whether they are supportive of the youths goals or not. There are cases where a clinician is unable to work with parents and families due to violence and abuse of youth as a response to their gender identity. As a result, many of these youth are kicked out of their homes or flee on their own to escape violence. The trauma, shame and hatred transgender and gender nonconforming youth experience from their families, on top of harassment and trauma they experience on a daily basis (at school, in the community, at work, etc) and the extreme increase in people in positions of power and politicians at all levels in this country and society as a whole telling transgender people they are not human, not worthy of care or support and even threats on their lives greatly increases their trauma, anxiety, depression and risk of suicidality. Transgender youth

who live at the intersection of oppressed identities, especially Black, Indigenous and People of Color, is endemic.

[The Trevor Project 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ+ Mental Health](#) captures the experiences of nearly 34,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 24 across the United States, with 45% of respondents being LGBTQ youth of color and 48% being transgender or nonbinary, our fourth annual national survey is one of the most diverse surveys of LGBTQ youth ever conducted. This data provide critical insights into some of the unique suicide risk factors faced by LGBTQ youth, top barriers to mental health care, and the negative impacts of COVID-19 and relentless anti-transgender legislation. This research also highlights several ways in which we can all support the LGBTQ young people in our lives—and help prevent suicide.

I know gender-affirming care is lifesaving care firsthand as a parent. 3 years ago, my son was struggling with extreme anxiety and depression. He began hitting himself in the head and telling me he wanted to die. I was so horrified and afraid. When he came out as transgender and we accepted him wholeheartedly his symptoms began to decrease. When we pulled him from public school- where he watched his transgender peers be bullied and harassed by teachers and students- and enrolled him in a school where there are many LGBTQ+ youth and affirming teachers, his mental health symptoms continued to decrease. He then wanted to pursue hormones. Due to my and my partners expertise, we were able to walk him through what that entails, what the risks are and what his goals are. After his PCP, PMHNP, and therapist also talked to him and our family about it as well as completing assessments, they agreed to write letters and submit them and a referral to the OHSU gender clinic. He was put on the waitlist. During his first appointment, we all met with the team he would be working with- including a social worker, physician and epidemiologist who specialize in gender affirming care. Again, they walked my son and our family through the risks, process and his goals. Last June, our first Pride Month celebration was going together to get his first dose. He was beaming- so joyful and happy. Since he has been receiving hormone therapy, his mental health symptoms have all but disappeared. If my child had not had access to gender affirming care, I believe he would likely have attempted (or completed) suicide. Gender affirming care saved his life.

In 2023 so far, at least six transgender and gender non-conforming people's lives have been tragically and inhumanely taken through violent means, including through gun and interpersonal violence.

On November 20th, 2022 (Transgender Day of Remembrance) LGBTQ+ people around the world awoke to the devastating [news of a mass shooting](#) the night before at Club Q,

an LGBTQ+ club in Colorado Springs. A total of 5 people were killed, including two transgender individuals, Daniel Aston and Kelly Loving, creating terror in our communities across the country. LGBTQ+ people now know we are not safe anywhere, even in the places we have created and gathered together safely to experience joy in community for decades. [Here is the Human Rights Campaign's Report: An Epidemic of Violence 2022. Fatal Violence Against Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People in the United States in 2022.](#)

In 2021, the total number of recorded (an important distinction as a large number of transgender people's deaths due to violence are dismissed or ignored) transgender people killed was 59 —the highest number recorded since the Human Rights campaign started tracking in 2013. The total number of recorded incidents of fatal violence against transgender and gender non-conforming people between 2013-2021 increased from 256 to 268.

In every case, the highest number of transgender people who have been killed are transgender women of color.

Our transgender youth know all of the above. There is no way to escape the news, social media and word of mouth reports. We are bombarded every day. When I open the internet, I see dozens of articles on anti trans legislation and attacks on trans rights. The vast majority are geared toward transgender youth and their parents/families. Transgender people of all ages are terrified and many of us struggle with hopelessness and feeling like there are very few reasons to go on living.

The level of grief and fear my child and family live with every day is so painful and traumatic. I am grieving over the fact that there are people who question our experiences, our need for high quality health care, housing, employment- our very basic needs to be met breaks my heart. How can humans not care about our lives? How can humans now care about the high rates of us being murdered? Dying by suicide? I am crying as I write this.

I was in Salem yesterday to support HB2002. The courthouse was packed and when I saw the number of NO ON 2002 stickers and people opposing the bill, I immediately feared for myself and my transgender community. Would there be people opposed to the bill outside potentially verbally and/or physically attacking us? Would the Proud Boys show up in mass? Would they be carrying weapons and make an attempt to kill transgender people? Given my experience, even in Portland, this fear was very real.

I had hoped to sign up to testify, but missed the deadline. As I watched and heard the public testimony I was devastated. Listening to people claim we are mutilating on children, and so much more. I shook with fear for my child and all our gender-nonconforming children. And I was glad I did not testify in person because I was afraid. I was also filled with pride and inspired by the courage of my colleagues and local experts, and especially the public testimony. Transgender women sharing very intimate and personal stories in a space filled with so many people who believe our existence is unacceptable.

Oregon is already a leader on trans health care access: Since 2015, the Oregon Health Program and private insurers have covered certain gender-affirming care procedures. Please expand care for our most impacted community members and Oregon citizens, many of whom are transgender women of color. Expand access to health care crucial for hundreds of trans people in Oregon, including electrolysis (hair removal), necessary for safety and surgery and facial affirmation surgeries.

HB2002 will help close coverage gaps in life-saving gender-affirming care access for transgender Oregonians. By voting to advance this crucial legislation, you will be making our health care system more equitable, and opening countless doors of opportunity for transgender Oregonians. Your yes vote will demonstrate that we know transgender people are human beings, deserving of human rights and access to all the care we require to be healthy, whole human beings.

Please remember my story when you are voting on this bill, and please vote YES on HB 2002.

Thank you,
Cee Bondurant