

Submitter: Marika Straw
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure: SB1583

Dear Representatives,

I worked as the LGBTQIA+ Advocate at a rural community-based domestic violence advocacy organization from 2020-2023. I was the main point person in Wallowa County for LGBTQIA+ people, including youth, looking to connect to support. In this role, I witnessed and held people in pain that no human being should have to experience. Pain that is preventable.

According to the Trevor Project, a national advocacy organization supporting LGBTQIA+ youth, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among young people, and LGBTQIA+ youth are four times more likely to seriously consider suicide, make a plan for suicide, and attempt suicide than their peers. I know that we all have a shared goal of protecting Oregon's youth. Access to information around gender, sexuality, consent, boundaries, and abuse helps prevent and mitigate these incredibly high levels of self-harm. Access to representation around diverse sexual and gender identities is also a major protective factor against suicide and self harm.

In the course of my work, I witnessed and held the pain of several local LGBTQIA+ teens who self-harmed. One of my greatest fears is that one day, one of them will no longer be with us.

I am so excited that this bill is a possibility because we already fought an attempted ban of an LGBTQIA+ sex ed zine here in Wallowa County in 2023. Although we were successful and that zine is still accessible in our public library, fighting it felt like a waste of our time and precious energy that could be spent on more life-giving things. After the meeting when it was decided that the zine would remain accessible, I spoke to one of our queer teens who is fourteen years old. I asked them how they were feeling. They said, "I just wish we didn't have to fight this." It broke my heart to hear a fourteen-year-old be so weary already about fighting for their rights, including access to information affirming their identities.

This bill would be such a relief for our LGBTQIA+ community. Being the one point person in our county for queer teens was an incredibly intense experience because all of them felt like they had inadequate support and inadequate connection to resources to be okay at even a basic level. Please understand how important and life-saving access to diverse materials in schools is and vote yes to preserve access to them.

Thank you,

Marika Straw
Enterprise, OR
Wallowa County