



**LGBTQIA2S+ Youth & Suicide Prevention
Public Comment Guide**

*Developed by the Alliance LGBTQ+ Advisory Group
September 2022*

Public Comment Guide: LGBTQIA2S+ Youth & Suicide Prevention

Goal:

The goal of this resource is to equip suicide prevention advocates with appropriate language and easy-to-access resources for providing public comment to support LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, two-spirit) affirming policies and practices.

Background:

The Alliance's policy priorities include promoting affirming LGBTQIA2S+ policy and practices as protective factors against suicide and a host of other negative health outcomes. We aim to be intersectional in our approach, recognizing that youth with multiple marginalized identities are more harmed by discriminatory policies and practices.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, we have seen increasing attacks against LGBTQ+ youth and BIPOC youth at local and state levels here in Oregon and throughout the country. We expect 2022-23 to continue this trend, with increased frequency of harmful policies being introduced and increased frequency and severity of violence against these populations. One key way we can disrupt and mitigate harm is to get involved with policy makers, from school boards through state legislature. We can speak up against harmful policies and practices, advocate for protective policies and practices, and hold organizations accountable.

While this document will focus mainly on public comment at school board and PTA meetings, it may also be applicable for public comment at advisory meetings, city council meetings, county board of commissioners, state legislation, etc.

We recognize that school board members have a complex leadership role in setting the tone for the experiences of both students and teachers in their district. In this time of pandemic and political division, creating a sense of safety, hope and connection for all students is more important than ever. The policy decisions and the tone school boards set at meetings and in public discourse are important to the whole community.

Luckily, we have statewide policies that guide support for priority populations in schools, including LGBTQ+ students. [Adi's Act](#) and the LGBTQIA2S+ Student Success Plan. Adi's Act requires all public K-12 school districts to have comprehensive suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention plans, with particular emphasis on higher-risk youth populations such as LGBTQIA2S+ youth, youth of color, youth with disabilities, and youth in foster care. The LGBTQIA2S+ Student Success Plan is supported by Oregon's Student Success Act and works toward safe, equitable, and supportive learning environments for LGBTQIA2S+ students.

This document and the sample statements provided are intended to influence public officials in tone setting/ground rules for discussion and to create accepting environments for LGBTQIA2S+ people. The language offered is intended to help influence people who care about youth and young adults but are challenged by LGBTQIA2S+ inclusive policies and practices.

Before getting started, it may be helpful for you to review these foundational documents – [An Ally's Guide to Terminology: Talking about LGBTQ People & Equality](#); [Talking About Suicide & LGBT Populations](#); [Oregon Safe Schools & Communities Coalition- State of Safe Schools Report](#); [Talking About Anti-LGBTQ School Bills and False "Groomer" Attacks](#)

In this guide, you will find:

- Information on why public comment is important
- Core components of a public comment
- Examples of public comment
- Tips for crafting & delivering your own public comment
- Resources for more information
- Examples of other advocacy from the Alliance

Our Approach

We approach this work with some underlying assumptions:

- most people love their children and want to see them do well
- most people can get behind the cause of youth suicide prevention

These assumptions are further supported by **core concepts of equity** in suicide prevention:

CORE CONCEPTS

- The reasons people die by suicide are complex and rooted in a cultural context.
- Suicide prevention is about changing our beliefs, values, practices, and policies from an individual lens on suicide to a culturally contextualized lens.
- Disparities strongly and systematically exist for individuals and groups with certain social identities and/or group characteristics.
- Social identities are gender, race, ethnicity, social class, wealth, educational attainment, religion, sexual orientation, ability, age, language, housing status, immigration status, veteran status, geographical location, and certain professions.
- While high-risk populations may be identified as the groups with the largest represented demographic in suicide, it is not the same as identifying groups that have been impacted by forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, homo-and transphobia, and linguicism.
- Most importantly, in an equity lens, we must consider high-risk populations in the context of their social identities and systems that have impacted their risk for suicide, rather than individual characteristics alone.

Why Public Comment?

Public comment is a tool we can use to have our voices heard by decision makers. We may use public comment to raise issues, voice support or disagreement with proposed policies, hold authorities accountable for their words and actions, or even to express gratitude for specific actions taken or policies adopted. It is also a great tool to help communities and movements build power for a cause. [Harvard's Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation](#) highlights six reasons why public comment matters:

- Commenting is an opportunity to influence or change things.
- Commenting helps decision makers make sure that legal facts, unintended consequences, or errors are not overlooked.
- Commenting provides a chance to point out issues, offer alternatives, improve language, and help decision makers identify new solutions to issues at hand.
- Commenting is an important way to share expertise on a given issue. Though no qualifications are necessary for giving public comment, we can use facts and established data sources to support our comments.
- Commenting also helps elevate the reality of lived experiences of those who are most affected by an issue, policy, or regulation.
- Commenting helps decision makers gauge public acceptability of their actions.

Public comments are saved for historical records. These records can be used in the future to continue supporting a cause or to further arguments.

Crafting Public Comment

Components of a Public Comment:

- Greeting to board
- Who you are and the lens from which your statement is coming from (e.g., "parent and suicide prevention advocate," "concerned community member," "suicide loss survivor," etc.)
- Position statement- share experience if applicable
- Ask or call to action – related to practice or policy
- Evidence to support your statement – appeal to logic
- Respectful sign-off

Considerations for Public Comment:

Public comment to school boards can be provided in various ways. The most common avenues are via email or live (in person, Zoom, or by phone) spoken comment. **Live comment often has the most impact.** To provide live comment, you may need to sign up 24 hours or more in advance. Please look into your local school board policies for more information on requirements.

School boards can limit the length of public comments to as little as 2 minutes per speaker. As you prepare your statement, it may be helpful to do several timed run-throughs before the meeting to ensure your comment will be heard in full.

Sample School Board Comments

Below you will find sample comments provided from different perspectives on different issues. These sample comments are based on true events happening at school board meetings across the state.

Oral comment regarding the tone of school board meetings, from a concerned community member:

Good evening [Local School Board], thank you for having me here today. My name is [Name], I live in [Town], and I am here as a concerned community member and youth suicide prevention specialist. I have been following the school board meetings for some time and am troubled by what I have seen. At the last meeting, we heard from various anti-LGBTQ+ activists who used derogatory, harmful, and discriminatory language and homophobic slurs in their public comment. This language went unchecked by school board leadership and was allowed to continue throughout the meeting. I am concerned about what that means for our students. If such hostility is welcome in this meeting, does that mean it is similarly welcome within the schools?

The Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition's State of Safe Schools Report reveals that it is- in 2020, 6 in 10 LGBTQ+ students reported experiencing bullying and harassment in their schools from other students, faculty and staff, and community members. This is double the rate of the general student population.

The well-being of children is important to all of us. Every child needs to be able to learn and thrive in a safe environment free from bullying and harassment. Which is why it's so harmful when anti-LGBTQ+ activists are allowed to attack LGBTQ+ students and the kids of LGBTQ+ parents. This vulnerable population is left isolated, unsupported, and afraid.

In looking at the impacts of pervasive anti-LGBTQ+ social hostility there is an increase in suicidal ideation and attempts by LGBTQ+ youth. The same State of Safe Schools Report found that nearly half of all LGBTQ+ 8th and 11th graders in Oregon seriously considered suicide in 2019. And we must be clear that this population's suicide risk is not because they are LGBTQ+, it is because of how society treats LGBTQ+ people. When LGBTQ+ youth are in affirming and supportive environments, they thrive.

As a school board, you have the responsibility to set the tone for what is and isn't acceptable in our schools and public discourse. I am calling on you to interrupt harmful language when it happens and make it abundantly clear that it is not acceptable in this meeting, in our schools, or in our community. If this issue is left unchecked, we can only expect it to escalate and further harm students. Thank you for your time.

Oral comment from a teacher/parent regarding anti-LGBTQ+ comments made at school board meetings:

Thank you, [Local School Board], for having me here today. My name is [Name], I live in [Town], and I am here as a concerned public school teacher and parent of a student in the district.

It is vital that the school board stop public comments when they include homophobic and transphobic language. As adults and leaders, you are the example and you show our city what is acceptable and what is not. If we are to be a truly equitable district, where all students can not only learn but thrive, we must not validate the voices of those who wish to erase LGBTQIA+ students, teachers, and staff. This wouldn't be allowed in the classroom, why would we allow in a school board meeting?

As a queer educator, I want to ensure I can continue to serve students, supporting them through their secondary educational career. The rhetoric being used in these meetings is detrimental to the safety and health of our queer educators and staff. Homophobic and transphobic testimony not only affects students but the adults teaching these students.

Queer students and staff are a vital part of our school community. Instead of allowing bullying and intimidation, please stand up for us and ensure we are truly creating an equitable district and city where all students and adults can live healthy and happy lives.

Written comment from a SPED teacher expressing thanks to some school board members and expressing concern over the reinstatement of teachers who led a discrimination campaign against trans students:

Board Members [name], [name], and [name]:

Thank you for standing with your original decision regarding the termination of [teacher 1] and [teacher 2]. I appreciate you standing with the District Equity policy and standing with LGBTQ+ students in [town].

Unfortunately, the school board's decision to reinstate these educators not only sets a dangerous precedent for future termination decisions, but it also sends a damaging and unsafe message to the LGBTQ+ students attending [town] Schools who may already feel marginalized in their school setting. We need to ensure that school boards stay invested in the health and well-being of all students, not amplify voices of disinformation that cause harm.

With the pandemic far from over, the 2021-22 school year continues to be challenging for many students. Students need to feel a positive connection to their school and know that they are surrounded by adults who will affirm and honor their identities. This school board decision completely negates messages of safety and belonging in school.

As a special educator serving districts throughout [the region], I have multiple students on my caseload who identify as a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Creating safe spaces and modeling affirming practices for students is crucial. A recent study from the University of

Cambridge indicates that there is evidence to support that Transgender and Gender Diverse people are 3-6 times more likely to also be diagnosed with autism. As a special educator, my concerns with this school board decision are significant, as it will most likely have multiple impacts on students that already need specific supports to be successful in school. As an educator who also is a member of the LGBTQ+ community, it creates significant concerns as well.

Nationwide, 90% of LGBTQ+ students hear anti-LGBTQ comments at school; according to the Oregon Student Wellness Survey, most students never report the incident, and only 35% said it resulted in effective staff intervention. **When harm happens, it must be addressed so that it does not set an example for others.** Reinstating these teachers does not restore a sense of safety and create an environment where trans students are safe, motivated, and supported to learn. How will you respond to the harm that has been done?

These educators are making an argument that they exercised their freedom of speech. They exercised this freedom with an injustice to others. When you harm others, justice disappears. Rather than trying to repair the harm they caused, they continued to amplify their messages of harm and disinformation. Placing these two educators back with students, or in any type of leadership role could result in additional trauma and should be heavily considered.

The school board must reflect on the decision they made and reflect on the fact that LGBTQ+ students and educators have been harmed by transphobia in the [town] school system.

Sincerely,
[NAME]

Written comment from a local behavioral healthcare provider on concerns about teachers appealing their termination for discriminating against trans students:

To [town] School Board Members:

I understand that [teacher 1] and [teacher 2] have appealed their termination and the [town] School Board is considering their reinstatement. I urge you not to reinstate these two women.

They have caused great harm to an already very vulnerable group of students in the School District. The students were relieved by their termination and felt that the School District was actually listening to their needs and concerns. Reinstating those educators would completely undermine the message that the students have been heard, that they matter, and that they deserve to have a safe welcoming school environment.

Superintendent [name] had no choice but to put [teacher 1] and [teacher 2] on immediate leave as soon as they released their "I Resolve" video. They stated their school affiliation and used their roles as educators to project the appearance of legitimacy. These two women identified themselves as [town] Educators and then asked all of their colleagues to join them in their discrimination campaign against transgender students. They also promoted a political campaign when they urged colleagues and others to contact the ODE Board of Education to try and block passage of Senate Bill 52 that promotes equity for LGBTQ+ students statewide.

Studies in Oregon show that LGBTQ students suffer from twice the rate of bullying and harassment as their peers and they are three times as likely to miss school because they were afraid for their safety at school. This kind of hostile school climate makes it much harder for students to learn and leads to depression, anxiety, self-harm, drug abuse, school dropout, and even suicide attempts. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death in 10–24-year-olds in Oregon. Half of all LGBTQ students said they seriously thought about killing themselves and 25% of all LGBTQ students actually attempted suicide. [teacher 1] and [teacher 2] are contributing to that hostile environment rather than creating a safe school climate for all [town] students.

Research shows that training school staff and creating a welcoming school climate reduces bullying, helps build more resilient students, improves academic success, and reduces the risk of negative outcomes including suicide attempts in LGBTQ students. But instead of supporting transgender and gender non-binary students, [teacher 1] and [teacher 2] stated that transgender children should not even exist. They claim that gender is binary and immutable based on their own personal religious beliefs, despite the fact that all reputable science refutes their beliefs based on biological facts.

Under the United States Constitution, teachers do NOT have the right to force their personal religious beliefs on public school students. Yet these teachers not only refused to call students by their name or use their pronouns, they even proposed using “anatomically-male and anatomically-female” designated bathrooms and locker rooms. I have a serious question for the School Board Members: who do you propose stand outside the “anatomically designated bathrooms” checking the genitalia of our students before entrance? If that sounds absurd, it's because it is perverse and a completely unacceptable violation of student privacy. Yet that is exactly what these two teachers propose.

[Town] should be a community where every child knows that they belong, that they matter, and where every teacher has the training and skills to promote the healthy development of every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, country of origin, disability, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression. There is no place in the [town] Schools for teachers like [teacher 1] and [teacher 2] who put their personal interests above the needs of their students. I urge you to protect the students of [town] from their overtly bigoted, hostile, and biased attitudes.

Respectfully,
[name, credentials, organization]

Written public comment from a former teacher and current community organizer, raising concern for the treatment of LGBTQ+ students and staff:

Dear [District] School Board members,

My name is [name]. I am a former educator at [school 1], [school 2], and [school 3]. I am the lead organizer for the [local nonprofit], and act as an advocate and support for local LGBTQ+ communities. I am also a transgender, queer person. I moved to [County] in 2012.

I have sent this letter before. I realize you are getting substantial emails from parents who are being told that trans students are a threat to their children's safety. I'd like you to imagine the impact of this public campaign against transgender and gender nonconformity on trans students in your schools. **I am asking you to stand up to them, and for the Board to take a public stance in defense of the rights of transgender and LGBTQ+ students to a safe school environment.**

In case you missed it in my last letter, I will retell my story:

On my first day teaching at [school 1], the principal called me in to his office. "What's your agenda here?" he asked. I said, "I'm here to teach theatre." "Yes, but what's your agenda?" Well.... I'm here to teach theatre. My name is [name] and most people call me "he" or "they." We agreed that the kids would call me Mr. [name] but he and the HR person both said that I couldn't possibly tell the students that I identify as transgender. "That would be like me talking about what I do with my wife!" he said. They also talked about a prior transgender employee who had been fired for telling students she was transgender, as she was transitioning and it was quite obvious, and the kids naturally wanted to know what was up.

This created a lot of challenging situations for me. I'm pretty androgynous, and when kids would be naturally curious and ask "Are you a boy or a girl?" I would say.... "No." Now, five years later, I know that what happened was illegal. I had the right to say who I was, openly, and without shame. Gender identity is not perverse. It is not the same as talking about your sex life. What happened to me was wrong.

Now, as an adult advocate, I help run a local LGBTQ+ youth group for kids in the [Valley]. I have also been working with [District] students over the past 6 months as they have hosted rallies, gatherings, and meetings to share their stories about what it's like to be queer, gay, or trans in [District].

Things are not all right. One eight-year-old reported another student telling her she was a psychopath when she expressed curiosity about attraction to other girls. Students repeatedly shared stories of teachers not intervening, not speaking up, and reported a school climate that is fearful, homophobic, transphobic, and unsupportive. Youth reported harassment and abuse on the bus, teachers refusing to call students by their names, teachers explicitly saying that they hate trans people, and students being mercilessly harassed by other students.

I also want to share that we did a survey of LGBTQ+ people in [two counties] in 2020 and heard from over 500 people. 100% of the LGBTQ+ youth in [District's county] who responded reported that they had experienced harassment or discrimination because of their sexuality, gender, or appearance. 100% reported feeling they needed to hide their identity to avoid

harassment. And 100% reported feeling like they needed to leave the area to live a good life. I am deeply concerned by these experiences of LGBTQ+ students in your district, and I'm asking you to speak up to defend and support these students.

This community is diverse, strong, and one of the most beautiful places on earth. **Transgender students and teachers are part of our community and we want them to stay here!** It can be hard to understand what it means to be transgender, or what it feels like, if you haven't met a transgender person before. That may be true for many community members, whose discomfort with the idea of transgender people can get framed as a lack of safety, when really transgender people are the ones experiencing harassment and violence. There are 0 recorded cases of cisgender people experiencing violence from transgender people in public bathrooms. **Our schools need to take leadership to speak up, educate the community, interrupt misinformation and fear, and support students to fulfill their promise that students have equal opportunity for learning.**

I am grateful for your reiteration of the basic laws we have around nondiscrimination. **I know [District] students and educators need you to go farther--to take a strong, clear stance in support of all students, which means listening and paying attention to the experiences and needs of transgender and non-binary students.** Students have asked clearly for mandatory staff training as well as training for the student body, integration of LGBTQ+ history into the curriculum, female and LGBTQ+-affirming/aware therapists, and a no-tolerance policy for teachers who are intentionally discriminating against or harassing transgender students.

Thank you. I hope to be an ally and support as we work together to make [town]'s an awesome place for everyone who lives here, and live up to [District]'s promise of creating a safe, motivating environment for all students.

With gratitude,

[name]

Tips for Providing Public Comment

- Encourage others to attend with you and give public comment. There is power in numbers.
 - Share the load – use your group to take turns attending different community meetings, providing comment or testimony, etc. Update each other and stay connected.
- Speak to **shared values** – safety of our children, freedom, rights, etc.
 - This resource on [Trans Youth Messaging Strategies from the Transgender Law Center](#) has some great examples of values-based statements and shares why they are so impactful. **See the embrace/replace language on p. 11**
- Frame your message as a suicide prevention, health, & human rights issue.
 - Ex. *“We must be clear that this isn’t a party-line, political issue; it is a health and human rights issue. All Oregonians deserve support. The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide’s core mission is to reduce Oregon’s high rate of youth and young adult suicide. We are deeply concerned that the lives of our youth and young adults are at risk should similar policy pass here.”* – from the Alliance’s letter to OHA
- It is helpful to identify your affiliation with respected suicide prevention experts, initiatives, organizations
- Borrow language from respected sources when you can AND use your own words to add strength to your argument.
- Help your audience understand accepting and rejecting behaviors and their relationship to suicide risk for LGBTQIA2S+ youth (Family Acceptance Project’s research)
- Include the importance of allies- identify yourself as an ally if applicable and offer ideas for others on how to be an ally.
- Less focus on individuals- make it the responsibility of society-at-large (and schools as a proxy) to create supportive and non-rejecting environments.
- Remember, how we talk about suicide makes a difference.
 - Do:
 - Emphasize prevention
 - List or acknowledge warning signs
 - Highlight the effectiveness of treatment for underlying mental health issues
 - Talk about suicide as a symptom of larger issues (social climate, access to resources, discrimination, familial rejection, etc.), with multiple intersecting risks
 - Don’t:
 - Normalize suicide by presenting it as a common or expected death for LGBTQIA2S+ individuals
 - Focus on the personal or specific details of a death by suicide
 - Glorify death by suicide
- While this is an important aspect of community care, you must also practice good self-care. As school board meetings become more tense, attending them can take a toll on our bodies and minds. We need you to be well and we support your self-care priorities.



LGBTQIA2S+ SUICIDE PREVENTION PUBLIC COMMENT GUIDE



WHY PUBLIC COMMENT?

Public comment is a tool we can use to have our voices heard by decision makers and hold them accountable for their words, actions, policies and practices surrounding LGBTQIA2S+ youth. Benefits can include:

- Opportunity to point out issues, offer alternatives, improve language, and help decision makers identify new solutions to issues at hand.
- Sharing expertise, data, and facts
- Elevate the reality of lived experiences of those impacted by issues, policies, and regulations



CRAFTING PUBLIC COMMENT

Consider these key components when drafting your commentary:

- Greeting to board
- Who you are and the lens from which your statement is coming from (e.g., “parent and suicide prevention advocate,” “concerned community member,” “suicide loss survivor,” etc.)
- Position statement- share experience if applicable
- Ask or call to action – related to practice or policy
- Evidence to support your statement – appeal to logic
- Respectful sign-off



HELPFUL TIPS FOR PROVIDING PUBLIC COMMENT

- Power in numbers! Encourage others to attend and add their comments on the issues.
- Speak to shared values- safety of our children, freedom, rights, etc.
- Frame messaging around suicide prevention, health, and human rights.
- Identify affiliations with respected suicide prevention experts, organizations, and initiatives
- Borrow language from respected sources, and use your words to strengthen your argument
- Help audience understand accepting and rejecting behaviors, and their relationship to suicide risk for LGBTQIA2S+ youth
- Emphasize the importance of allies- offer ideas on how to be a good ally
- Less focus on individuals- focus on society-at-large (and schools as a proxy) to create supportive and non-rejecting environments
- Practice good self-care!



SUICIDE PREVENTION LANGUAGE BEST- PRACTICES

DO: Emphasize prevention, list or acknowledge warning signs, highlight the effectiveness of treatment for underlying mental health issues, and talk about suicide as a symptom of larger issues (social climate, access to resources, discrimination, familial rejection, etc.), with multiple intersecting risks

DON'T: Normalize suicide by presenting it as a common or expected death for LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, focus on the personal or specific details of a death by suicide, or glorify death by suicide



LGBTQIA2S+ SUICIDE PREVENTION PUBLIC COMMENT GUIDE



FACTS ABOUT LGBTQIA2S+ YOUTH - NATIONAL DATA

- **LGBTQ youth who have supportive families and are in supportive environments have higher resilience.** Both LGBTQ youth who reported living in an affirming home or attending an affirming school also reported higher resilience than LGBTQ youth in non-affirming homes or schools.
- **LGBTQ youth with high resilience had 59% lower odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the past year compared to LGBTQ youth with low resilience.**
- The majority of LGBTQ youth (52%) who were enrolled in middle or high school reported being bullied either in person or electronically in the past year.
- **LGBTQ students who reported being bullied in the past year had three times greater odds of attempting suicide in the past year.**
- LGBTQ students who reported their school to be LGBTQ-affirming had 30% lower odds of being bullied in the past year.
- **45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. Nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide and LGBTQ youth of color reported higher rates than their white peers.**
- LGBTQ youth who found their school to be LGBTQ-affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide.
- **LGBTQ youth who live in a community that is accepting of LGBTQ people reported significantly lower rates of attempting suicide than those who do not.**

Sources: [Trevor Project - Resilience & Mental Health Among LGBTQ Youth \(2022\)](#)

[Trevor Project: Bullying & Suicide Risk Among LGBTQ Youth \(2021\)](#)

[Trevor Project: 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health \(2022\)](#)



FACTS ABOUT LGBTQIA2S+ YOUTH IN OREGON

- About 8% of Oregon 6th, 8th, and 11th graders are trans or gender-expansive.
- About 1/3 of Oregon youth identify with an LGB+, other, or unsure sexual orientation.
- **About 1 in 4 Oregon youth experience conflict at schools based on race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.**
- **The vast majority of LGBTQ students (more than 88%) in Oregon regularly heard anti-LGBTQ remarks.**
- **61% of LGBTQ+ Students report being bullied.**
- **43% of transgender students report seriously considering suicide.**
- LGBTQ+ students are 3x more likely to miss school due to fear.

Sources: [OHA 2020 Student Health Survey](#)
[2019 GLSEN Oregon Snapshot](#)

[Oregon Safe Schools & Communities Coalition 2020 State of Safe Schools Report](#)

Questions You May Have

Don't we already have protections for LGBTQIA2S+ students? What about Title IX?

Yes, but that doesn't mean everybody supports them or will act accordingly. Some people are advocating against protections and wants them to be removed all together. Negative comments made about LGBTQIA2S+ students and their rights and protections can have profound negative effects on school and social climate and student mental health. Title IX is federal policy that protects against sex-based discrimination of students and is tied to funding for public schools. Guidance from 2016 included sexual orientation and gender identity as protected from sex-based discrimination under Title IX. This was rescinded in 2017 by the presidential administration. The Department of Education is considering updating Title IX to once again include sexual orientation and gender identity. [Public comment is open until September 12, 2022.](#)

Do I need to out myself when providing public comment?

No. Identifying yourself as LGBTQIA2S+ is up to you, what you feel comfortable with, and what will keep you safe. Unfortunately, as we see increased violent language and heated discussions, we see increased physical violence and harassment as well. You can still speak from personal experience, as a witness, or as a "friend" to someone who experienced something. Consider what kind of support, care, and protection you might need if you choose to publicly self-identify. You may choose to only identify in written statements rather than oral statements, in any statement you make, or not at all. We fully support whatever works for you.

Where might these discussions pop up?

- School board meetings, particularly those covering social-emotional learning (SEL), sexual education, student success acts, library books and required readings, mental health curricula, equity, anti-racism, and more.
- In conversations with other parents/students
- At city council meetings, county commission meetings, state legislative sessions
- Local newspapers—covering school board meetings or publishing letters to the editor (you can write those, too!)
- In your coalition meetings
- On local facebook group pages, nextdoor, etc. (especially if LGBTQ+ events are occurring in town or the school board information is highly publicized!)

Why is the Family Acceptance Project research important to this conversation when we're not talking about families?

The Family Acceptance Project's groundbreaking research discovered that [reducing the amount of familial rejection toward LGBTQ+ youth is greatly protective against suicide](#). Additional research describes [behaviors that are felt as accepting or rejecting to LGBTQ+ youth](#). School environments often act as proxies to families. Youth generally spend more time in school than at home, and some youth may see school as an escape from a rejecting family environment, and schools-based resources are often provided to help families. We therefore see the Family Acceptance Project research as applicable to more settings than exclusively within family systems.

- *Ex. Positive content about LGBTQ+ people and issues in classroom curricula help increase feelings of safety in school and reduce suicide risk for LGBTQ+ students.*

How can I stay up to date?

In part, whenever Alliance advocates to state agencies via letter, the letter will be shared with permission to send to local school boards or other decision-makers. We encourage you to get involved with your local school board and other public meetings. This is easier with a group of concerned people who can lift each other up and share the work being done.

Is extra help available if/when I want to provide public comment?

Assistance requests can be made through the Alliance. While we will do all that we can to help in a timely manner, we cannot guarantee availability for all cases.

Please contact Annette Marcus and Kris Bifulco with any requests: amarcus@aocmhp.org & kbifulco@aocmhp.org

Resources & Recommended Reading

- **Messaging Guides & Strategies**
 - **Movement Advancement Project-** [Talking about LGBT Issues Messaging Guide](#) (lots of great language to use and even more tips & tricks!)
 - [Trans Youth Messaging Strategies from the Transgender Law Center](#)
- [Oregon School Board Association \(OSBA\)](#) - The Oregon School Boards Association is dedicated to improving student success and education equity through advocacy, leadership and service to Oregon public school boards.
 - [OSBA Resources](#)
 - [Notes on Public Meeting Laws](#)
 - [Ask OSBA: Does the public have a right to speak at a public meeting?](#)
 - [Be Your Best on the Board - Guide for Board Chairs](#)
- [GLSEN Public Policy Agenda](#)
- **Family Acceptance Project – Research on impacts of family acceptance and rejection on LGBTQ+ youth**
 - [Family Acceptance Project Publications](#)
 - [Oregon LGBTQ Resources](#)
- **Youth-led advocacy**
 - [Youth Era – youth advocates & leadership training](#)
 - [Oregon School-Based Health Alliance - Student Health Advocacy](#)
 - [Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation](#)
 - [Youth Mandate School Board Elections Toolkit](#)
- **Native Youth Resources**
 - [Celebrating Our Magic Toolkit](#)
 - [Allies Pamphlet](#)
 - [Paths Remembered: Trans and Gender-Affirming Care in IHS/Tribal/Urban Facilities](#)
 - [Healthy Native Youth Resources Page](#)
- [Basic Rights Oregon - Legislative Advocacy for LGBTQ+ Issues in Oregon](#)
- [Equality Federation - Accelerating Advocacy in the LGBTQ+ Community](#)
- [Berkeley Media Studies Group – Framing 101](#)

The following pages are examples of organization-to-organization advocacy and accountability efforts. The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide sent letters to the Oregon School Board Association and to Oregon Health Authority to raise concern for LGBTQIA2S+ youth and their experiences of systemic discrimination in Oregon.



August 30, 2021

Jim Green, Executive Director
Oregon School Board Association
1201 Court St NE, Ste 400, Salem, OR 97301

Dear Jim Green and Members of the School Board Association:

We are concerned that the recent decision of the Newberg School Board to ban visible support, such as Pride flags and Black Live Matter messages, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) and Black and Brown youth will contribute to negative health outcomes, including suicide. As members of the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide we are working towards this vision: *In Oregon all young people have hope, feel safe asking for help, can find access to the right help at the right time to prevent suicide, and live in communities that foster healing, connection, and wellness.* The Alliance is the statewide youth suicide prevention advisory to the Oregon Health Authority. Our members include suicide loss and attempt survivors, families and youth, regional coalitions, and a broad range of leaders and subject matter experts.

We recognize that school board members have a complex leadership role in setting the tone for the experiences of both students and teachers in their district. In this time of pandemic and political division, creating a sense of safety, hope and connection for all students is more important than ever. The policy decisions and the tone school boards set at meetings and in public discourse are important to the whole community.

We are asking you, as the Oregon School Board Association, to support the implementation of the African American/Black Student Success Plan (HB 2016, 2015), Student Success Act (HB 3427, 2019), Adi's Act (SB 52, 2019), and the LGBTQ2SIA+ Student Success Plan (SB 52, 2021) and to work with your school board to help them understand why Pride flags and Black Lives Matter flags are not political presentations; rather, they communicate to students that they belong, are safe, and that there are adults who will support them.

Ongoing research demonstrates that rejecting behaviors from significant adults in young people's lives increase risk for suicideⁱ, and that affirming and supporting the lives of our most marginalized and vulnerable populations increase protective factors - not just for that population, but for everyone within a community. The Newberg decision affects all of the youth, families, faculty, and staff in the district, and is deeply felt across the state. This decision is also in clear violation of several legislated public school guidelines.

According to the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities 2020 report, 50% of Oregon eighth grade students who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, have considered suicide, with 27% making a suicide attempt (State of Safe Schools, 2020). Nationally, we are also seeing a rise in suicidality among Black youth, with a 72% increase in suicide attempts among Black youth from 1991 to 2017, and even more elevated risk for Black boys between the ages of 5 and 11 (Zara Abrams, Sounding the Alarm on Black Youth Suicide, APA 2020).



For Black and LGBTQ+ students, as well as those carrying two or more of these identities, and exposure to violence and discrimination, directly contributes to suicide risk. Black and LGBTQ+ students often have their lives politicized. Research has shown that banning items (such as Pride flags or Black Lives Matter signs) that affirm the lives of these students will increase the risk of both internalized distress and victimization. Lack of representation and acceptance has been found to cause a number of health disparities, including suicidality. Based on decades long research on acceptance among LGBT youth, Ryan et al. (2014)ⁱⁱ, identified and measured common behaviors that are not thought of as rejection, such as *not talking about or discouraging an adolescent from talking about their LGBT identity or denying and minimizing an adolescent's LGBT identity*. As such, these reactions are often experienced as rejection by LGBT adolescents, contributing to a host of physical and mental health issues, including depression, illegal drug use, and suicide.

Please know that you are not alone in your work. We are here to serve as a resource for you when having these difficult conversations. For example, national expert Dr. Caitlin Ryan partnered with Oregon Family Support Network to develop a website specifically for parents and families of LGBTQ+ youth. ([Oregon LGBTQ Resources OFSN](#)) The website has a rich array of resources, including downloadable posters highlighting specific accepting and rejecting behaviors. These are intended to facilitate conversation and educate. Another key resource is the **Racial Equity Support Line**

503-575-3764 is a service of Lines for Life, led and staffed by people with lived experience of racism. A useful list of resources may be found here: [United Way Racial Equity Resources](#)

We can help connect you to other subject matter experts and organizations that are committed to the health, wellbeing, and equity of services for all students, and join your efforts as educators, facilitators, and concerned community members. Please feel free to reach out to us by contacting the Alliance policy manager, Annette Marcus, at amarcus@aocmhp.org.

With hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Galli Murray", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Galli Murray, Chairperson, Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide

Cc: Spencer Lewis

ⁱ RESEARCH BRIEF: Anti-LGBTQ Discrimination Inflicts Disproportionate Harm on People of Color, National Center for Lesbian Rights, June 2021. https://www.thetaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/LGBTQ_Discrimination_PR.pdf

ⁱⁱ C Ryan - Temp. Pol. & Civ. Rts. L. Rev., 2013

May 16, 2022

Dear Director Patrick Allen; Behavioral Health Director; Steve Allen; Director of Child and Family Behavioral Health Chelsea Holcomb:

We are writing to ask that OHA make a clear public statement regarding the agency's commitment to supporting and affirming LGBTQ+ youth and families given the plethora of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation sweeping the country. We commend Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education, for his public statements reaffirming ODE's commitment to supporting transgender students as heard on Think Out Loud on Oregon Public Radio ([Link to Colt Gill Interview](#)), and hope to see similar public statements from OHA.

This letter is on behalf of the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide and our LGBTQ+ Advisory Group. We are alarmed by the national wave of anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Research shows us that discrimination and negative messaging about the LGBTQ+ community puts youth and young adults at higher risk of suicide, among other negative health outcomes. As of April 8, 325 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced, with 130 of those bills specifically targeting transgender youth (map attached). In Oregon, we are aware of similar discriminatory policies being discussed or passed by school boards as well as community-wide organizing to attack trans and LGBTQ+ youth and their families.

As Basic Rights Oregon wrote, "Here in Oregon, we aren't seeing any of these hateful and unnecessary bills come to pass—yet. But we are witnessing the humanity of transgender and queer people once again become a political football for politicians eager to gain attention and inspire the worst instincts of potential voters." This creates an opportunity for those of us working on suicide prevention, including the Oregon Health Authority, to publicly affirm our support for LGBTQ+ people.

We must be clear that this isn't a party-line, political issue; it is a health and human rights issue. All Oregonians deserve support. The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide's core mission is to reduce Oregon's high rate of youth and young adult suicide. We are deeply concerned that the lives of our youth and young adults are at risk should similar legislation pass here.

We feel that a public statement by OHA has the potential to be protective for LGBTQ+ youth, young adults, and families. They need to hear that in Oregon they are supported, accepted, loved and protected. Just to share one compelling statistic, the 2019 Healthy Teens Survey reported that **47%** of Oregon's trans youth had seriously considered suicide. Statistics like this make it clear that advocating for youth suicide prevention must include advocacy to affirm the experiences of Trans and LGBTQ2SIA+ youth. In contrast to the harmful legislation, we are seeing in

Who We Are

The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide is charged with advising the Oregon Health Authority on the development and administration of strategies to address suicide intervention and prevention for children and youth 5 through 24 years of age, and consulting with the Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Coordinator on updates to the Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan under ORS 418.733 to develop a public agenda for suicide intervention and prevention across agencies, systems and communities. Alliance members are appointed by the OHA and include subject matter experts, state agencies, suicide prevention coalitions, and both youth and adults who either have experienced a suicide loss or their own struggles with suicide thoughts or attempts.

other states, research proves that gender affirming care and support for LGBTQ2SIA+ build protective factors, reduce stigma, and ultimately reduce risk of suicide. We can make a difference and save lives by implementing policies that support:

1. **Family acceptance of LGBTQ2SIA+ youth.**
2. **Access to gender affirming care.**
3. **Positive content about LGBTQ+ people and issues in classroom curricula to help increase feelings of safety in school and reduce suicide risk for LGBTQ+ students.**

Here at the Alliance, our committees and advisory groups can (and are) actively promoting these kinds of policies by coordinating OHA's LGBTQ mini-grants, supporting initiatives that promote partnership with the Oregon Pediatricians Society, work through our Schools Committee on Adi's Act, including highlighting the need to promote a positive, culturally responsive school climate such as the various Student Success Plans (i.e., LGBTQIA2S+ Student Success Plan, Black Student Success Plan, etc.), and programs like Sources of Strength that help students to actively build a community of support and inclusion.

This is a matter of urgency, as we are already seeing efforts at school boards across the state to limit implementation of protective policies like the LGBTQIA2S+ Student Success Plan. It is likely that during the next legislative session, legislation mirroring the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in other states will be introduced in Oregon. The Oregon Health Authority, with its focus on health equity and inclusion and its position as a state leadership organization, has a responsibility to take a public and proactive approach to helping legislators and community members understand the gravely dangerous health implications of policies such as criminalizing gender affirming care for minors, excluding trans youth from sports or proper bathrooms, or speaking about LGBTQ+ lives.

We request a response from OHA leadership. Our June 10, 2022 quarterly would be an ideal time to share this response since it also Pride Month. A response can be sent to our policy manager, Annette Marcus, amarcus@aocmhp.org. Thank you for your continued work to prevent suicide.

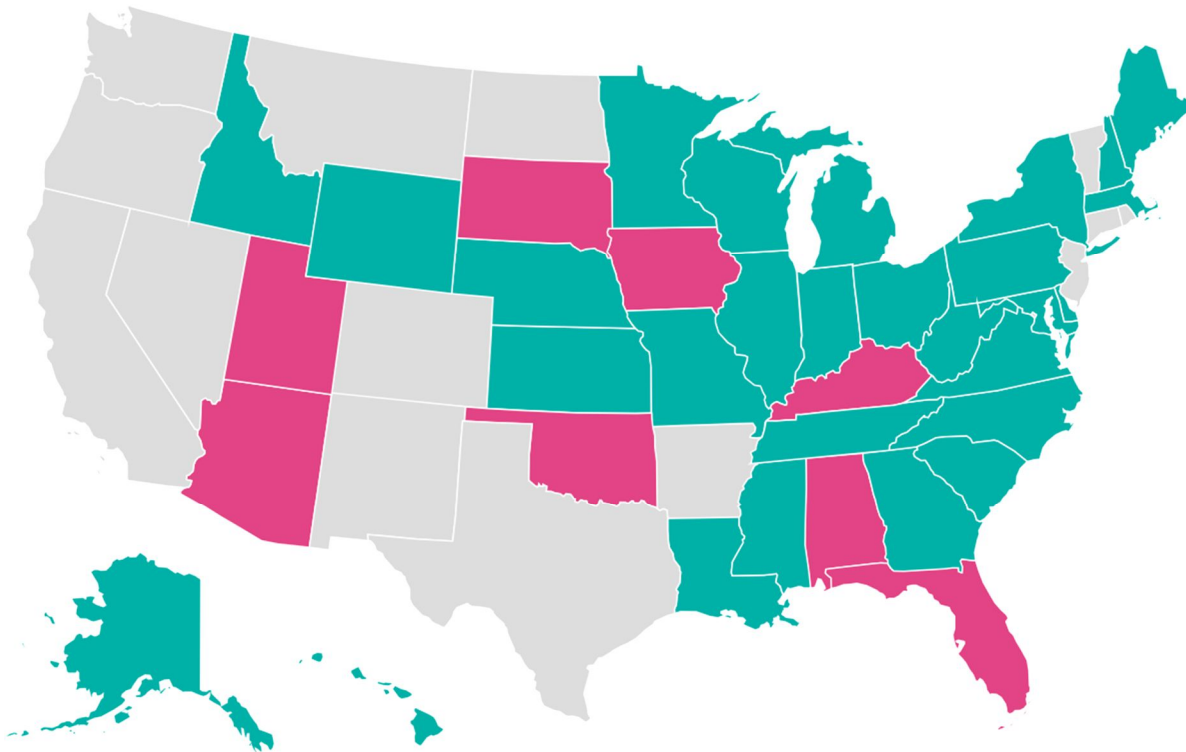
Sincerely,



Galli Murray, LCSW
Chairperson, Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide.

P.S. You can find statements of support for these type of policies from medical and professional associations along with supporting research at the National SOGIE (Sexual Orientation Gender Identity & Expression) Center website [here](#). Among cited organizations are the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and over 20 child health and welfare groups nationwide.

CC: State System of Care Advisory Committee, Children's System Advisory Council, OHA Suicide Intervention Prevention Team (Meghan Crane, Jill Baker, Shanda Hochstetler, Debra Darmata, Taylor Chambers)



Updated Friday, April 15, 2022



States with no anti-LGBTQ bills introduced/not in legislative session (14 States & DC): Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Washington, Washington, DC



States that have introduced anti-LGBTQ bills (28 States): Alaska, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

Thank You & Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone involved in reviewing and supporting this document as well as those who are actively supporting LGBTQIA2S+ youth. We'd particularly like to acknowledge the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide's membership, the LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee, the LGBTQ+ Mini-Grant Community, Rogue Action Center/LGBTQ Listening Project, Citizens for Safe Schools, and the teachers, parents, and community members who shared examples of their own public comment to add to this document. Finally, we would like to thank you, the reader, for your interest in this work.