



TO: House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee

FR: CM Hall, Board of Directors, Basic Rights Oregon

DA: April 3, 2013

RE: Support for HB 2995

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2995. My name is C.M. Hall. I coordinate the Western Region Interpreter Education Center at Western Oregon University, and have worked in higher education for seven years. I am also a member of the board of directors at Basic Rights Oregon, the state's leading advocacy organization for gay and transgender communities, representing tens of thousands of Oregonians from every corner of this state. We strongly urge passage of HB 2995.

HB 2995 is a simple bill and I would like to take a moment to walk through it. It would require public universities and colleges to add sexual orientation to the list of routine demographic data already collected on existing forms. It allows universities and colleges to update their forms at the time of reprinting to avoid incurring additional costs for new forms. And, like any other demographic information, it is optional for anyone filling out the form to participate by disclosing information regarding status. This is a modest but important proposal to collect important information to address disparities.

According to *Too Afraid to Learn*, a 2008 survey of over 3,500 Oregon college students, a hostile campus climate has a significant impact on gay and transgender students. One in ten gay and transgender students took more than five years to graduate due to anti-LGBT sentiment. Over half of gay and transgender students concealed their sexual orientation on campus for fear of personal safety, discrimination or rejection. And more than sixty percent of all students reported witnessing instances of homophobia, ranging from homophobic language to violence.

As university staff, data collection matters to me both personally and professionally. I want all students to get the support they need to thrive at Western. Faculty and staff strive to provide this support individually. Collecting data on the experiences of students, faculty and staff would help our institutional practices catch up to our individual practices.

Clear, consistent data collection would allow Oregon colleges and universities to accurately assess and appropriately address the experiences of gay and transgender students, faculty and staff. HB 2995 would allow students, faculty and staff to identify their sexual orientation on forms collecting demographic information, without mandating collection.

HB 2995 allows colleges and universities to replicate successes and address disparities—and that strengthens Oregon colleges for ALL students. **Basic Rights Oregon supports HB 2995 and we urge the Committee to move it forward.**