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To: Oregon State Legislature
From: Lindsey Wilkinson
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Re: Support for House Bill 2995

I am an assistant professor of sociology at Portland State University. I currently teach courses related to gender and sexualities, education, and quantitative methods. I also conduct quantitative research on the well-being of sexual minority youth and young adults. Unfortunately, data that allows researchers such as me to assess the educational outcomes, experiences, and needs of gay and transgender youth and young adults, particularly at the post-secondary level, is lacking and thus in high demand. That is why I am here today urging you to pass House Bill 2995 to provide Oregon the opportunity to become at the forefront in the use of evidence based research to serve gay and transgender students in higher education. While gay and transgender college students are often quite resilient and successful, this population is also at greater risk of academic disengagement and poor educational, occupational, and health outcomes. Understanding their needs and experiences in college through better data collection and analysis will enable educational institutions to use their scarce resources more effectively to support gay and transgender students.

I first started in this area of research in part because I was given access to Add Health, or the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Add Health was the first nationally representative sample of youth that included any information on sexual orientation and educational experiences and outcomes. While research done by myself and many others using Add Health has contributed to our understanding of factors that shape the success and failure of sexual minority youth and young adults, increasing awareness and influencing policy, particularly in K-12 schools, Add Health is now more than ten years old and provides little insight into the experiences of college students beyond measures of attendance and attainment. In fact, based on recommendations by myself and other social scientists, the American Educational Research Association is preparing a report urging policy makers to include questions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity on surveys currently in use, including those funded by government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education. This is a simple and cost-effective way of collecting this important data, yet political impasses often make this goal difficult to achieve.

Much of the current knowledge we have about gay or transgender students and their post-secondary experiences is based on small convenience samples that are often plagued with methodological issues such as selection bias, small cell sizes, and a lack of a comparison group, which call into question the validity and reliability of findings. House Bill 2995