

May 9th, 2013

Chair Hass and members of the committee,

My name is Dan Cushing and I am the Vice President of the Associated Students of Oregon State University and a self-identified bisexual man. I'm here today to testify in support of HB 2995. I do not claim to speak on behalf of all LGBTQQIAA, or queer, people; rather, I hope to represent my constituents, who feel that it is high time for the formal recognition of our sizable and vibrant queer community.

As you all may know, queer rights and social acceptance has improved dramatically in recent times, but there is work yet to be done. To borrow from the feminist movement, I will remind the committee: "the personal is political." In other words, our identities have implications for our role in society, and the rights conferred or withheld from our communities shape our personal lives and success. On our university campuses today, openly queer folks face bullying, violence, and discrimination, among other hardships. Remaining in the closet can have detrimental impacts to a person's mental health, which is especially challenging for university students who need their full mental faculties for classroom learning, career development, and working part-time jobs to pay for school. Thus, despite recent successes in the legal and social realms, queer people both in and out of the closet continue to be an oppressed group in our society.

In order to combat this oppression, which is affecting a vast number of our students in the state of Oregon, we need to better understand their struggle and provide resources when appropriate. And in order to do that, we need to know these people through demographic data collection. By allowing folks such as me to self-identify the way one identifies other aspects of his/her identity, we will empower our institutions to confront the issues facing the queer community in a conscious manner.

As I'm sure it has already been stated, a self-identification measure for sexual orientation will not provide a wholly accurate accounting for our community, as many folks will likely identify "straight" for fear of reprisal. Nonetheless, it is a step in the right direction for our state. Personally, I feel that recognizing the queer community statistically through self-identification would have affirmed my value to the university community, empowering me to become a more successful scholar. For my constituents who are queer, as well as the friends, roommates, classmates, colleagues, students, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, mothers, and fathers of queer folks, passage of this bill means moving Oregon forward as a pioneer of a more free and just society for us all.

I ask this committee to recognize the existence of queer communities on our college and university campuses and pass HB 2995 out of committee. Thank you so much for your time.

Respectfully,

Dan Cushing
Vice President, ASOSU