



2014 Oregon Teacher of the Year  
Brett Bigham

January 28, 2019

Dear Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Linthicum and members of the Senate Education Committee;

I would like to share a very raw and emotional wound with you. When I was fifteen years old my best friend told me he would never date women again. I gave him a hug, did my best to cheer him up and then he drove home. I never saw him again. At school on Monday I was led into a private room and told he had committed suicide. Nobody knew why. I did.

That was in 1980. I was a sophomore in high school. I never saw the world the same again after that. I knew that there are young people who come from homes where being dead is the choice taken over being gay. The suicide rates for LGBT youth are horrible. They give me nightmares. They should be giving you nightmares.

This is not a city-versus-the-country problem. This is not a democrat-versus-republican problem. LGBT kids are born to rich parents, poor parents, conservative parents and liberal parents. But the truth is too many of them are so bullied and so traumatized by how society treats them, that they are ending their lives. In the cities there are gay youth clubs, and community events. For youth in far corners of our state there is often nothing. Those students may go their entire school career without ever hearing a positive thing said about LGBT people. We must do something to support these vulnerable youth.

Don't be fooled into thinking that this is just an LGBT issue. Though LGBT youth make up at least 30% of youth suicides, that is only 1/3 of the numbers. Teen suicides happen to every group of kids, both sexes, rich and poor, black and white, it doesn't matter who, or why, what matters is we do our best to stop it.

The simple truth is we do not have enough counselors in the schools to meet the needs of our children. We must act on a state-wide level to get supports into the schools. I am asking for your complete and full support of Adi's Act SB 52. The "R" or "D" behind your name does not matter on this one.

When a young person commits suicide, society loses everything they have invested in that child. The families are left in shambles. Their friends are left with wounds that never heal and the doubt that they should have done more. There is only loss and pain in suicide. We must do everything we can to stop it. Voting to pass Adi's Act is the right thing to do.

Sincerely,