



February 6, 2019

Re: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 52

Chair Wagner and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Nancy Haque and I'm the Executive Director of Basic Rights Oregon. We are an organization that advocates for public policy that meets the needs of our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) communities, and centers on racial and transgender justice. We're also particularly focused on the needs of LGBTQ youth and that's why we're here today in support of SB 52, Adi's Act, to provide each school district with model suicide prevention policy and require that each district have a policy.

In 2017, the Oregon Health Authority's Healthy Teens Survey uncovered a startling reality in Oregon:

- Nearly half of lesbian, gay or bisexual 8th graders have contemplated suicide
- Close to a quarter of lesbian, gay or bisexual 8th graders have attempted suicide
- Almost a third of transgender 8th graders have attempted suicide

These numbers are staggering and alarming. But each number also reflects a person. This bill is named after Adi Staub, a young girl who died by suicide last year, who struggled at her high school after coming out as transgender. I want to thank her parents, Christine and Lon, for being here today to tell Adi's truth, to help ensure that other parents do not have to go through the same tragedy and that more youth see a future for themselves.

It is not easy to tell these truths but it is so important, so that we stop the increase in youth suicide in Oregon. On a personal note, I wrote my first suicide note as a fourth grader. Suicidal ideation was a constant struggle for me for over ten years, the entirety of my adolescence. As a young, queer person, with working class immigrant parents who knew nothing of my struggles, I had few places to turn. In sixth grade I wrote a short story for school, which centered around suicide. After reading it, my teacher, Mr. Wolf, told me that he had discussed my story with the principal, because there was a policy in place that whenever a student mentioned suicide, they would make sure to check in with both the principal and the student. Just having the conversation helped me feel seen, knowing there was someone who knew that maybe things weren't as okay as I tried to pretend they were.

This is why schools need to have the right knowledge, tools, and resources to address concerns around youth suicide. Basic Rights Oregon is advocating for Adi's Act to provide all school districts in Oregon with a model suicide prevention policy, based on national best practices, that promotes suicide prevention, intervention, and healing after suicide in a school community. The bill requires each school

district to have policy that addresses populations at higher risk for youth suicide, including LGBTQ youth, youth with disabilities, and foster youth.

The amendment before you is the result of collaboration with education stakeholders, and in particular the Oregon School Board Association, to ensure that policies also translate into living plans within each school district. We thank them for their collaboration and for the numerous partners who helped craft this bill, including suicide experts like Lines for Life, the Alliance to Prevent Suicide, as well as school counselors and administrators.

While Adi's Act is absolutely necessary to ensure all school districts have a policy and plan for suicide prevention, it is one piece of the solution. Our schools need more resources for student mental health supports. We strongly support legislative efforts to garner these resources for schools through other bills being considered by this committee and the Student Success Committee. For instance, you'll hear more today about the Student Safety Task Force proposal - we are especially encouraged by the focus on anti-bullying and suicide prevention work in their proposal. Basic Rights Oregon has also endorsed HB 2224, COSA's Student Social and Emotional Health and Development Fund, which makes a \$85 million investment in the social, emotional, and mental health of our students by empowering districts to hire school social workers, school counselors, nurses and other professionals to work with kids and their families. There are other proposals, as well, and we are heartened that this legislature is taking up these issues now because we do not have time to wait.

For now, we ask you to start by passing Adi's Act, so young people, no matter how they identify or who they love, see a future for themselves. Thank you.