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House Committee On Business and Labor

Oregon State Legislature

900 Court St NE

Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB 2694, *a Bill to Include LGBT-Owned Businesses in Oregon Economic Opportunity Programs*

Dear Mr. Chair and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2694.

My name is Julie Eickhof, my pronouns are she/her, and I am a queer woman entrepreneur. I am a resident of Washington County, Oregon, as well as a small-business member of Portland Area Business Association (PABA). My branding agency, Eickhof Creative Shop, became an NGLCC Certified LGBT Business Enterprise® (Certified LGBTBE®) in July 2020.

Professionally, becoming a Certified LGBTBE® has provided our agency more opportunities than I could have imagined. Entrepreneurs are eager to vote with their dollars, and we have landed multiple clients who feel more at ease working with an openly inclusive organization. We are more attractive to top talent as we grow our team, and we have gained visibility from making the Portland Business Journal's 2020 List of the Largest LGBTQ-Owned Businesses in Oregon and Southwest Washington. (Spoiler alert: We are small but mighty.)

Personally, I was absolutely surprised by how deeply moving it was to receive third-party validation for my identity. My identity is not a performative act, of course, nor does it require external acceptance – but it sure is nice to be acknowledged. For decades, I was an ally who felt an inexplicable affinity with the LGBTQ+ community; now, after a long journey to coming out as pan / bi in 2017, I feel like I have been accepted in a really special, meaningful way.

So why do we need one more minority business designation? Because it should have been a given that I would pursue LGBTQ+ certification at the first opportunity, but I did not. I am not naive to the risks that come with being highly visible as a queer disabled woman, and I thought long and hard about my willingness to publicly and irrevocably own my identity. Plainly, it could have put me out of business – or put me in harm's way.



I took that risk because I am afforded a great deal of privilege as a white, cisgender individual. But we must do better. Until we *all* can enjoy the fundamental human right that is our freedom of identity; until we *all* can pursue entrepreneurship openly, with no risk of being targeted; until we *all* can simply thrive and succeed as our authentic selves – we need to incentive, normalize, and destigmatize participation for as many LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs as possible.

By adding *lesbian, gay, bisexual* and *transgender* to the definition of a "minority individual," the State of Oregon will be using its immense power to create greater social and economic opportunities for LGBTQ+ businesses, which in turn makes it safer for everyone to be open about *all* intersectional identities.

To those who might be inclined to think that additional minority designations would somehow leave less of the proverbial pie for everyone else, let me reassure you that kindness toward others, especially the most vulnerable among us, is an infinitely renewable resource. In fact, the State of Oregon has already proven itself to be a strong advocate for those who might otherwise be overlooked.

You see, my business is also a Certified Benefit Company, and as you may be aware, Benefit Corporation status is typically reserved for corporate entities only. That is, unless you're fortunate enough to be in Oregon, which is one of the few states to allow LLCs like mine to pursue that higher standard. My getting Benefit Company status as an LLC does not take away from any corporation's success. Likewise, adding an LGBT minority designation simply demonstrates that we, the people of Oregon, will continue to end up on the right side of history – and may that side be ever more crowded.

Thank you all very much for your time and consideration of my testimony, and I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB 2694.

Sincerely,

Julie Eickhof {she / her}
Founder + Brand Mechanic
Eickhof Creative Shop LLC