

TO: Oregon House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care  
FROM: Seth Johnstone, on behalf of Basic Rights Oregon  
RE: Support for HB 2002

Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and Committee Members--

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm Seth Johnstone, and I'm the Transgender Justice Program Manager for Basic Rights Oregon, the state's longest-serving LGBTQ+ advocacy organization.

I want to be direct with you today: HB 2002 will save lives. Our organization is proudly supporting the entire omnibus package, but I want to focus specifically on how this bill will improve access to gender-affirming care.

First, I should explain why gender-affirming care is so crucial. For many transgender people, access to this medical care is necessary for our mental health and well-being, as well as our physical safety. Major medical organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the Endocrine Society, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association, have published policy statements and guidelines on how to provide age-appropriate gender-affirming care. All of those medical societies find such care to be evidence-based and medically necessary.

A recent study from the UCLA Williams Institute shows that suicidal ideation decreases dramatically for transgender people once they gain access to this care. Additionally, trans folks—particularly trans women of color—are disproportionately targeted for violence in public and private spaces. Access to care that helps our physical appearance align with society's expectations of our genders adds a layer of protection for us. Gender-affirming care saves lives, improves our quality of life, and allows us to more fully thrive and contribute to our communities.

In my role at Basic Rights, I have the privilege of meeting and speaking with fellow transgender folks, their loved ones, and their medical providers from across the state on a regular basis. Trans Oregonians have varied and diverse experiences, but one common thread I hear repeatedly is that gender-affirming care isn't affordable or accessible enough for our communities.

I've heard from trans women who face anti-trans harassment because of their appearances. I've heard from Oregonians who spend more money on gender-affirming care than they spend on their rent, because going without it simply isn't an option for them. I've heard from folks who have to choose between driving two hours to the nearest provider or making a much-needed shift at work that day. And I've heard from people whose overwhelming dysphoria—the mental distress we experience when our outward appearance doesn't align with our gender identity—keep them from achieving their goals and existing fully in society.

I know Oregon can do better to support these members of our state.

Oregon is already a leader in trans healthcare access compared to most other states—we provide insurance coverage for some key components of gender-affirming care. But there remain huge gaps in insurance coverage for many life-saving procedures, especially for low-income folks, people of color, and rural Oregonians. These gaps continue to impact the safety, financial, and mental and physical wellness of this population here in the state.

HB 2002 will go a long way toward closing those coverage gaps. It will also allow medical professionals to deliver the care they know their patients need. We know Oregonians support the right to make medical decisions with your doctor and access the care you need, no matter how much money you have, where in Oregon you live, or what your gender is. This bill embodies those Oregon values.

I speak for myself as a proud transgender man, who has lived here since the time when there was absolutely no insurance coverage for transgender healthcare. I know directly the impact of looking to your insurance coverage and finding the entirety of your basic healthcare needs listed in the exclusions section. I had to work for years to put aside money to pay out of pocket for gender affirming care in my twenties when my peers were funding their education, housing, and more. I have witnessed a decade of progress, but we are not yet at a place of equal access, especially not for the transgender women and nonbinary folks in this state who the coverage denials impact disproportionately. I am here for Basic Rights Oregon, and for countless other trans Oregonians I've had the pleasure of meeting in my work when I ask you to please vote YES to advance HB 2002. Thank you.