



The mission of Outright is to build safe, healthy, and supportive environments for LGBTQ+ youth. Since 1989, Outright has provided social support space to build community, worked to make schools across Vermont safer, and given LGBTQ+ youth opportunities to become leaders, advocates, educators, and agents of change in their own communities.

Being a member of the LGBTQ+ community isn't a problem to be solved. Youth that come out aren't broken, or bad, or somehow less than their heterosexual peers. They don't need to be fixed. Yet LGBTQ+ youth live in a world that tells them this repeatedly. Outright exists to let these youth know that their identities are worthy of love, respect, and celebration.

In my work over the last six years, I have met youth who, upon coming out:

- Were immediately embraced and supported by their parents;
- Got kicked out of the house;
- Gotten locked in the basement until they denied their identity;
- Had their parents try to beat the gay out of them;

In terms of this bill, these are not the youth I am most concerned about. There are thousands LGBTQ+ youth in VT who will never connect with Outright, who may not be able to come out until they move out of their parents' house, or who may never be on the radar of any adult that could possibly offer them support. These are youth that often feel isolated and alone, and really struggle with the idea that "it gets better." These are the youth that we risk losing if we don't do something to protect them.

Loving your children means accepting them for who they are, not for who you want or expect them to be. Yet we know the variety of reactions parents have when their youth come out, from acceptance to rejection. We know that some parents think having an LGBTQ+ identity is something that can be changed, and they seek out conversion therapists to protect them from acknowledging and embracing their own child's identity. Identity CANNOT be changed. Not only does conversion therapy not work, it causes irreparable harm. Dozens of professional organizations representing physicians, social workers, clinicians, school personnel, and more have all spoken out against the harmful effects of conversion therapy.

Child abuse is child abuse, and conversion therapy is tantamount to child abuse. While we can't legislate parental love and support, we can work to protect youth. We need this bill to protect the youth we know about, and more importantly, the ones we don't.

LGBTQ+ youth are 6x more likely than their heterosexual peers to consider or attempt suicide. Nationwide, of that group of already very vulnerable youth, we know that LGBTQ+ youth that are rejected by their families are 8x more likely to want to die. EIGHT TIMES.



The time for action is now. This is a clear step we in Vermont can take that sends a strong message to our youth: You are not broken, you don't need to be fixed, and we need you here.

Questions?