



The LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont is comprised of representatives from a range of LGBTQIA organizations and individuals from the broader Vermont community. Our mission is to anticipate and collaboratively respond to proposed & enacted laws, policies, actions, and community-level crises that impact on LGBTQIA Vermonters. The Alliance provides expert advice to elected officials, political activists, state agencies, community based & professional organizations, and other interested parties on representing and protecting the interests and rights of LGBTQIA Vermonters. The group seeks to fairly represent the collective voice of LGBTQIA Vermonters through advocacy, community building, education, and representation.

To: House Committee on Education  
From: Keith E Goslant/Liaison Team of LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont  
Re: H.3

This letter of support for H.3 is submitted on behalf of the LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont. The Alliance views passage of H.3 as being a necessary and critical component in providing support and education to VT's LGBTQ youth.

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018 a LGBTQ Youth Leadership Day was held at the VT Statehouse. There were 65 self-identified LGBTQ youth who attended providing statewide representation. During the day time was scheduled for these youth to meet with the Governor and members of both the House and Senate. A common theme was the lack of education and support provided to them from within the educational network. Youth identified if a conversation relating to LGBTQ issues occurred that it was within the limited scope of a healthcare curriculum. They went on to share that, although traditionally well meaning, the staff providing the information lacked both specific training or experiences regarding the LGBTQ communities, as well as the needs of LGBTQ youth. From the information shared, VT's LGBTQ youth are being provided with an initial access to information regarding issues of sexual orientation and gender identity via internet searches. If they are fortunate they find their way to Outright VT, an organization dedicated to the support and advocacy of VT's LGBTQ youth, and the sponsor of LGBTQ Leadership Day.

The need for information and support, as expressed by the LGBTQ youth attending the 2018 Leadership Day, is critical, and is supported by these recent studies:

VT Department of Health: 2017 Youth Risk Survey (the most recent survey available): Complete results and executive summary available via: [www.healthvermont.gov/YRBS](http://www.healthvermont.gov/YRBS)

For the respondents who self-identified as LGBT:

- 30% High School students experienced electronic bullying in past 12 months as opposed to 15% self-identified heterosexual
- 55% Middle School students experienced electronic bullying in past 12 months as opposed to 24% self-identified heterosexual
- 23% Middle School students skipped school due to bullying as opposed to 7% self-identified heterosexual
- 15% High School students experienced physical violence as opposed to 6% self-identified heterosexual
- 48% Middle School students had made plan to hurt/kill self as opposed to 11% self-identified heterosexual
- 58% felt sad or hopeless every day for at least 2-week period in past 12 months as opposed to 25% self-identified heterosexual

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) report on LGBTQ youth and bullying includes these results from the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (the most recent results available), of self-identified LGB students:

- 10% were threatened or injured with a weapon on school property
- 34% were bullied on school property
- 28% were bullied electronically

According to GLSEN (Gay Lesbian & Straight Education Network):

- 42 per cent of LGBT youth have experienced cyber bullying
- 25 per cent more than once
- 35 per cent receive online threats
- 58 per cent say something bad is said to them or about them online
- Cyber bullying of LGBT youth is three times higher than other students experience.
- 33 per cent report sexual harassment online, which is four times higher than the experience of other students.
- 27 per cent of LGBT youth do not feel safe online.
- 20 per cent report receiving harassing text messages from other students.

This need is further supported by the findings in a 2018 published report by the Social Justice Sexuality Project Graduate Center, City University of New York entitled "Intersecting Injustice: A National Call to Action: Addressing LGBTQ Poverty and Economic Justice for All". Complete study/text can be accessed via: <http://socialjusticesexuality.com/files/2018/04/Poverty-Reports-Exec-Summary.pdf>

The study in its assessment of “Schools and Education” contains the following recommendations, again mirroring the statements made by VT’s LGBTQ youth.

#### **4.1**

##### **Making Schools Safe for LGBTQ Students**

The percentage of LGBTQ students who feel unsafe at school because of sexual orientation (sixty percent) or gender expression (forty per- cent) is staggering.<sup>2</sup> Because of negative school climates, LGBTQ students are more likely than not to avoid school bathrooms, locker rooms, and some school functions or extracurricular activities.<sup>3</sup> Even more concerning, almost two-thirds of LGBTQ students surveyed in 2013 by GLSEN had heard homophobic comments at school and more than half had heard such comments from school personnel.<sup>4</sup>

Discrimination against transgender and gender nonconforming students is particularly rampant, despite the fact that advocates argue that such students are covered by Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

##### **Recommendations:**

- Federal, state, and local departments of education should develop and implement guidelines and guidance related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression for their jurisdictions.<sup>5</sup>
- All primary schools, from elementary school throughout high school, should offer comprehensive sex education that is LGBTQ-inclusive and not abstinence-based.<sup>6</sup>
- Safe spaces for LGBTQ youth should be increased, utilizing the leadership of GLSEN chapters.<sup>7</sup>
- The enforcement of existing policies that protect youth who are LGBTQ, living in poverty, or both should be increased.<sup>8</sup>
- Federal, state, and local entities should promote the creation of safe and healthy schools where bullying is dealt with comprehensively and appropriately and the school-to-prison pipeline is eliminated.<sup>9</sup>
- Title IX protections should be amplified, and schools and school boards should be held accountable. At the federal level, the Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Education should release explicit guidance stating that Title IX protects transgender and gender nonconforming students from discrimination on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

#### **4.2**

##### **Training Teachers in Culturally Competent Curricula**

Much evidence exists touting the importance of strong(er) teachers in high-poverty schools; however, all too often, high-poverty schools tend to have weaker teachers.<sup>10</sup>

##### **Recommendations:**

- Recruiting, training, and retaining LGBTQ culturally competent teachers should be prioritized, as should implementing sensitivity training for teachers, staff, and school administrators on culturally competent and responsive discipline.<sup>11</sup>
- LGBTQ-inclusive history curricula should be developed.<sup>12</sup>
- School staff should be trained to be supportive of LGBTQ students and to intervene and effectively respond to verbal or physical harassment (e.g., bullying), as well as implementing an anti-bullying policy with particular attention to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.<sup>13</sup>
- Schools and school boards should develop partnerships with appropriate community- based organizations to provide cultural competency training to teachers and administrators in schools, as well as support and counseling for students and families.

While the scope and recommendations of the studies and reports cited above exceeds those included in H. 3, they do provide compelling support for its passage.

The Alliance hopes you will support and pass H.3 during this legislative session.

Thank you for your time and consideration.