



Remarks from Outright Vermont for the House Committee on Education re: Restoring Funding to support Statewide Education Work

To Representative Webb and the entire Education Committee,

Thank you for taking time this afternoon to hear our testimony. I am Dana Kaplan, I use he/him pronouns, and I am the Executive Director of Outright Vermont.

As you may recall from previous testimony (from Amanda Rohdenburg, our Director of Advocacy), for the past 30 years, Outright Vermont has provided comprehensive statewide initiatives that improve the lives of LGBTQ youth. Every program, training, and resource we provide ensures that these largely at-risk youth develop a healthy sense of self and vital peer connections. Simultaneously, we focus on strengthening families, and helping to transform schools, communities, and systems.

LGBTQ youth often face challenges associated with a lack of family support and acceptance, limited access to other peers who share their identity, and school climates where standards of safety, protocols and procedures differ dramatically between schools. Developing a healthy sense of self while fending off negative feedback can be all-consuming. A culture of exclusion, an inability to identify peer allies and/or adult role models, and a lack of access to resources due to our rural geographical landscape all contribute to youth feeling isolated and alone.

According to the 2017 YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data), LGBTQ youth in Vermont are 4.5 times more likely to have attempted suicide in the last 12 months than their heterosexual/cisgender peers, 3 times more likely to have skipped school because they felt unsafe on route or at school in the past 30 days, and 2 times more likely to be bullied. In addition, LGBTQ youth face high rates of bullying, harassment, anxiety, depression, body image issues, low self-esteem, and other adverse childhood experiences.

We know that students achieve greater academic success and are safer overall when they feel connected to their school (CDC, 2009, "School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth"). And I imagine we can all agree that schools want to be the best they possibly can, for their entire community of students, faculty, administrators, and families. It doesn't mean, however, that they know *how* to get there, especially when it comes to supporting some of our most marginalized youth identities. This is the expertise of Outright.

GLSEN conducts a National School Climate Survey - it's a report on the experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools, including challenges they face and school-based resources that support LGBTQ students' well-being. *This survey has consistently indicated that specific school-based supports are related to a safer and more inclusive climate.* The four indicators include supportive: educators, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, inclusive policies, and student clubs, Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs). Meaning, we

know what helps! But handing someone a road map and telling them to get to the destination is of no use if they don't know how to drive. Or, even if they are a great driver, doesn't make them immune to missing a turn along the way. Point being, implementation is separate from knowing the answers, and this is where Outright Vermont's Education efforts are critical.

SCOPE OF EDUCATION WORK

Each year, Outright serves over 2,100 LGBTQ youth and their families, and nearly 5,000 educators and service providers in every county in Vermont. Our goals are always to increase protective factors, improve school climates, and provide role models and sources of support to help youth thrive.

Outright Vermont provides comprehensive assistance to school districts statewide. Specific initiatives incorporate the following:

Trainings, Workshops & Consultations

Provided to teachers, administrators, counselors, and students in a variety of settings. Visiting classes, faculty meetings, assemblies, in-service days, as well as conducting audits of LGBTQ affirming spaces and policies, and providing recommendations for access and inclusion.

Social Support and Community

Mentoring and supporting students and educators through the Vermont GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance) Network, which currently houses over 70 schools statewide. We work with elementary, middle, and high schools to start or sustain these social, support, and advocacy groups. We offer technical assistance and regional networking to GSA's statewide, and help youth develop and deliver supplemental curriculum. GSA's help mitigate the risks of isolation associated with LGBTQ identities in favor of safety and inclusion.

Statewide learning opportunities and network building:

Annual events, including the GSA Conference and the Queer & Allied Youth Summit, as well as our online Youth Leadership Council, provide youth leaders with opportunities to develop peer connections, build skills, and create shared goals.

FUNDING

I am here today specifically to seek support in addressing a critical funding gap in our education program. For the past five years, Outright received funding from the Agency of Education to support the efforts outlined above. Last year the money we received totaled roughly \$60,000, most of which came through a federal grant. Unfortunately for Vermont, the federal government changed the eligibility criteria for the 2019 cycle, and our programs are no longer eligible to receive that critical funding.

Outright has worked hard to create a diverse revenue stream to ensure our programs are sustainable and able to reach every person, family, and system that needs us... and let me just say, there is a

tremendous need! With a full-time staff of 6, (three of whom do education-based work), our current annual operating budget for 2019 is \$529,351.

As you can see from the attached pie chart (last page of this document), we have projected that 30% of our budget must come from private contributions (individual and corporate), 20% from two annual events, 14% from foundation grants, 11% from fee for service revenue (camp and trainings), and 1% from rental income. The final 24% of our budget - \$125,000 - is what we hope to receive in government funding. For this year, we have accounted for \$85,000 of that total through federal grants. The rest is what we hope to have restored as sustainable and consistent State funding for many years to come.

Outright Vermont's Education Department tailors' trainings to individual school needs, provides realtime case consults via phone or in-person around specific student/family concerns, creates sample curriculum, supports implementation, and shares best practices. While we do ask for an honorarium for our professional development trainings, we do not turn schools away for their lack of ability to pay.

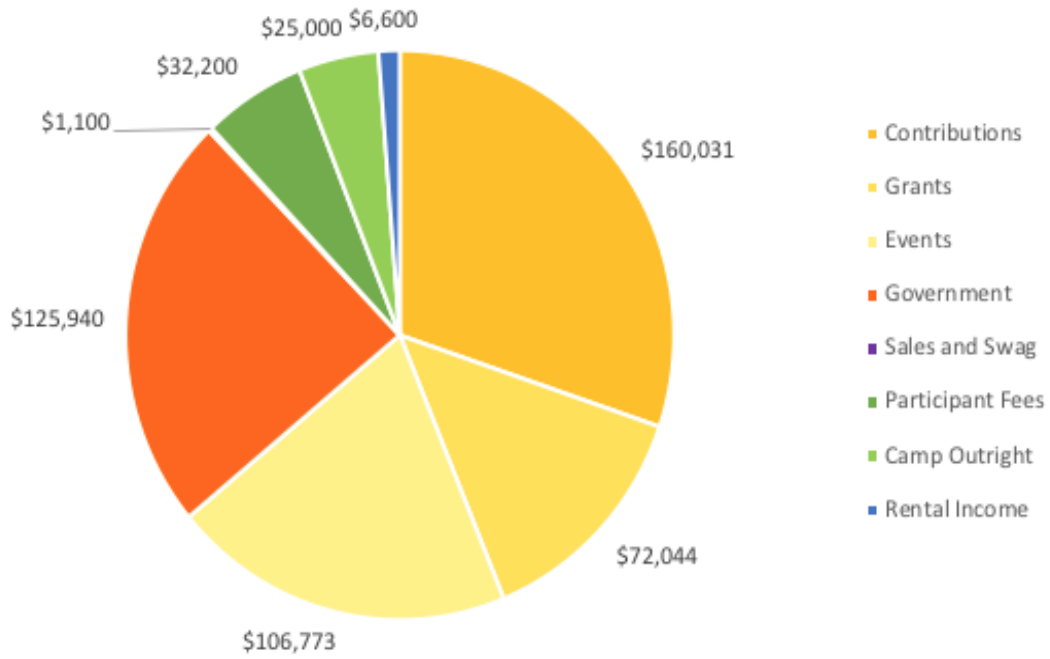
But the bottom line is, fewer resources, fewer trainings, less safe schools, more at-risk youth, and so on and so forth. This cut in funding, which has covered a majority of the salary dollars for our Director of Education, would radically shift our staffing, our service delivery, and Vermont's LGBTQ youth experience in schools. This is our moment to be out in front, as Vermont often is, to send a clear message about where our priorities are, and to back those values with critical dollars. Helping to provide stability for Outright Vermont means saying yes to safer and more equitable schools.

We are grateful for the strong support of H.3, which brings actionable steps to ensure ethnic and social equity in Vermont schools. We hear from LGBTQ youth across the state that they do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum they are taught. Inclusive education, and specifically LGBTQinclusive sexual health education, has been an Outright youth priority for the past many years (in addition to more training for teachers on LGBTQ competency). In fact, two of our Education staff members are currently across the street at the hotel giving a training to over 40 health educators from across the state on how to teach inclusive sexual health education!

It's hard to imagine Vermont schools - and specifically youth and educators in rural districts - functioning without the support of Outright Vermont, and specifically our education services. Without reliable funding, our ability to offer support to Vermont school communities is nonexistent. This funding gap jeopardizes our ability to provide guidance and refine policies that reduce risk and increase educational and health outcomes for LGBTQ students and school systems statewide.

On behalf of the Outright staff and board, and in solidarity with LGBTQ youth across the state, we thank you in advance for recognizing the need, and helping us to identify a source of funds to fill this gap so that we can continue our critical work on behalf of Vermont's at-risk youth.

FY19 Projected Revenue



LAMOILLE UNION MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

Dear House Education Committee,

I am a science teacher and faculty advisor of our Queer-Straight-Alliance (QSA) at Lamoille Union High School in Hyde Park, VT.

For my students whose gender identities and sexualities are outside of the majority, living in a rural community in Northern Vermont can present significant challenges. Geographical and cultural isolation can present very real physical and emotional harm. I simply cannot emphasize the importance of Outright Vermont in creating safe and inclusive spaces, providing resources, and connecting youth together to provide mutual support.

In the 10 ten years that our QSA has existed, Outright has provided a multitude of supports. When our first student publicly transitioned from female to male, Outright came to train faculty on best practices for creating an inclusive and affirming learning environment. We learned not only how to address questions of identity within the student population, but how also to affirm students' names and pronouns in our gradebooks and other public documents.

When, months later, an irate parent complained that our "liberal" school was influencing their child's gender identity, my first phone call was to Dana Kaplan. Unlike other organizations that provide information via databases and FAQs, Outright provides people who pick up the phone and give you an answer in real time. And when problems aren't resolved with over-the-phone advice, their team shows up in the flesh to be an active collaborator and advocate of equity.

In 2015, our QSA was proud to host Outright's statewide "Queer and Allied Youth Summit". The chance for my students to host an event brining 200+ innovative, mutually supportive students from around VT was an opportunity of a lifetime. Not only did students develop leadership and advocacy skills through social justice workshops and forge new friendships during social networking time, they also felt (perhaps for the first time) that they were "normal". The power of that shared experience, of being seen and valued and reflected in the community around you, cannot be overstated.

Ten years in, our school is a different place. Where once QSA flyers were torn from the walls and students used pejoratives to describe our club, we are now one of the best populated clubs on campus. With the help of Outright, our faculty is well-versed in strategies to build empathy and create inclusive, supported places. Most importantly, our students feel free to be themselves.

Sincerely,

Amber Carbine-March
Teacher,

VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

Dear House Education Committee,

My name is Christie Beveridge Howell, and I am the Director of Diversity and Inclusion and English Department Chair at VCS.

I want to express how invaluable Outright Vermont has been to my school community. We started our Gender and Sexuality Alliance Club (GSA) about six years ago, and right from the beginning, Outright has been there for us, offering support, education, and guidance. Each fall I take students to the Outright GSA conference, where we find both community for students and educators, and new ideas for the coming year. We are a very small school, so it is wonderful that my students can find other queer and trans youth from around the state with whom they can connect. This year, my students were particularly moved by hearing Christine Hallquist speak; they all said that she inspired them, and that they wanted her to come speak to our community.

We have had Outright staff visit our school a few times over the past years to deliver LGBTQ+ education to both our student body and faculty. Most recently, their education team came and delivered a powerful presentation to our entire school; afterwards, several students stayed behind to continue conversing with them and asking questions. The ability to have LGBTQ+ specific-content expertise, role models, and a safe way to access this information is in fact life-saving, and creates a ripple effect for the community. A few days after their session, we had three students join us who had never attended a GSA meeting before. It was clear that having Outright's education team speak to the students in such comfortable, accessible, and real ways contributed to their willingness to attend their first-ever meeting.

Mara Iverson, (their Director of Education) also deliver an essential education session for our faculty that same afternoon; it was one of the most productive and impactful faculty meetings we have had this year. Mara was helpful, knowledgeable, and open to any and all questions. We learned so much from her in terms of best practices in supporting queer and trans youth, and many of my colleagues commented to me afterwards how much she had impacted their overall thinking and approach to teaching.

My school has relied on Outright time and time again for their incredible educators and community-focused events. I can say with certainty that they have been a life-changing organization for my students, and as a teacher and GSA advisor, I can't imagine not having them as a local resource.

Sincerely,

Christie Howell

Dear House Education Committee,

My name is Julian and I am an 11th grade student at Vermont Commons School.

I would like to say that Outright, by visiting our school, raised awareness about basic LGBT+ ideas and gender identity in our school. The result of their visit helped establish a more open and accepting environment at VCS. While the LGBT community at our school is small, it is crucial for there to be as much LGBT awareness and support as possible because otherwise, it is an injustice, and unacceptable for the school's LGBT community to not feel safe, supported, or accepted.

HINESBURG COMMUNITY SCHOOL

“Teachers don’t always “get it” and when teachers who do get it try to talk to them, it doesn’t always work. When Outright comes, they get it.” EMG, Age 14

“If you (teacher) email teachers (or one of us students emails teachers) it’s something from school and they might not read it. They might just delete it. But when it’s something from Outright (a training) then they get the information.” CG, Age 11

“Outright trainings have created dynamic moments of growth for our school culture. The trainings have impacted the staff’s fluency with methods of supporting all of our students, helping us to examine how inclusive language, practices, and environment create healthy children. The presence of Outright is invaluable to faculty and students alike. As they are so local and accessible, it makes the idea of picking up the phone and calling on their expertise comforting easy.

When it was clear that our school needed further training to support transgender students, I knew just who to call. When it was clear our students wanted a GSA, I knew just who to call. As a result of their work, my colleagues and I are equipped with the information and resources we need to maintain and enhance a safe, enriching school environment for all students here at HCS. With the horrifying statistics regarding suicide and other risky behaviors connected to unsupported LGBTQIA+ students, there is a desperate need for this knowledgeable community resource, and I am so grateful for their service.”

- Danielle Sertz, Hinesburg Community School Teacher

“I have been through two of Outright's trainings and I in each case they helped the staffs better understand that the world is not binary, instead we all fall on spectrums of all types. I strongly believe that this knowledge helps educators become more accepting of student differences which in turns leads to a more positive environment for everyone.”

- John Pontius, Middle Level Principal Hinesburg Community School

“As an Advisor to the Hinesburg Community School GSA I have found the training and support from Outright VT to be essential in helping our school best educate and support our faculty and students. Our middle school group began after a training with Outright staff four and a half years ago, and they have been there to guide us every step of the way. The team at Outright understands that Vermont LGBTQ youth struggle most in school systems where the adults just do not comprehend their concerns and they have done a tremendous job in helping us educate faculty so that our school feels more safe and inclusive for everyone. Our program has come a long way in these early years and we look forward to growing the GSAs in our district’s other middle schools.

The team at Outright are super responsive to requests for school and district-wide trainings, as well as jumping on the phone or email to answer questions that impact our students. We appreciate having the local relationship with caring, compassionate experts that are available to us at the drop of a hat. Our students love to attend Outright VT’s various events and activities geared toward youth including the GSA Conference, the Queer & Allied Youth Summit, and the Outright VT summer camp. These local events help to connect LGBTQ students from around the state. At the recent conference in Hyde Park our students made new friends and gained so much self-confidence.

According to the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey results in the Champlain Valley School District our LGBT high school youth have significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation, substance use, and relationship violence than their cisgender, heterosexual peers. It is imperative that we do even more to support our LGBTQ students and educate our entire community and Outright VT helps us do that.”

- Lynn Camara, SAP Counselor, GLOW Advisor, & Champlain Valley School District Connecting Youth Project & Outreach Coordinator

“HCS is the most inclusive and open school community that I have worked in. The administration, teachers and staff, and students are more welcoming and open to all gender and sexual orientation expressions and identities than any other that I have experienced. For example, on a regular basis students use language that shows their awareness of the gender spectrum by saying “I’m not sure what their pronouns are,” or “I’m not sure how they identify.”

I credit this to the close collaboration with Outright through the trainings that Outright offers to teachers and staff, and the various conferences and workshops for students. These opportunities provide essential exposure to new ideas. As teachers, role models, and humans, we cannot be open and inclusive if we don’t understand, even if we mean well. Outright helps us to understand. Outright provides unique exposure to ideas and very concrete examples for how we can help students feel seen and validated. When I have questions about how I can better serve my students, I seek out the adults in

our building that have close contacts with Outright because they have the most awareness and they can ask Outright if they don't know." - Greer Krembs, HCS Teacher

"Outright has been our on-call social/emotional triage consulting team for any and all issues: individual student, student community, fellow faculty/staff communications advice, support for our CVU culture as a whole... They have also helped us imagine new futures for our students and our school culture, and then guided us in designing action plans that bring those visions closer to our day-to-day reality...

I would offer, too, that my own work with the amazing folks at Outright has broadened and deepened my own humanity. Particularly, that the notion of "spectrum" applies to the worlds of thought, feeling, and spirituality as much as, or perhaps more than, to the classic binary gender identity boxes. I have, through this work -- which has included individual conversations, group consultations, and workshop participation -- become SO much more available to SO many more students. And I have watched those students, in turn, become more courageous, more confident, and more eloquent in their work with their fellow students and our faculty/staff, both.

Outright Vermont's steadfast presence, constant availability, and flexible problem solving style, has taught me how to be steadfast, available, and flexible in my work with our LGBTQ+ students at CVU. We would not, I would not, be where we are today without them..." - Rahn Fleming, Learning Center Tutor, GSA C-Advisor

"I can't tell you the number of times I have reached out to Dana, Mara, and the Outright crew to ask for advice. I have been one of the advisors of the GSA at CVUHS for 15 years, and Outright continues to be the most important resource for us as we navigate the complexities of supporting our LGBTQ youth during a time when so many are struggling (46% of LGBTQ students at CVU reported that they physically harmed themselves within the last year; 26% made a plan for suicide; 14% attempted suicide). Supporting our LGBTQ students has to be a priority, and Outright has, and continues to be, our best resource for that support."

- Emily Rinkema, advisor for the CVU GSA (Gender Sexuality Alliance)

OTHER EDUCATOR QUOTES + FEEDBACK

"Yesterday was very helpful and thought provoking. I received feedback that you were an excellent presenter and we wished we'd had more time with you. We are making a number of changes

(bathroom signs, info out to parents) right out of the gate based on your suggestions, and I have concrete ways to move forward with the 8th grade student we spoke to you about. Thanks a million for coming to see us and sharing your knowledge and perspective. As an educator it is nice knowing that Outright VT is there. It is so reassuring to have your input and support.”

- Jory Innes, Orange Center School

“Thank you so much for taking the time to work with our staff, and thank you for the additional resources! I took a quiet poll, checking in with certain staff members to sense how it was received by others. Overall the reception was very positive! The consensus was that Outright’s training answered many questions that some were too afraid to ask, and for others, it gave them an opportunity to realize it's okay to be asking questions. Definitely a good start. You did a wonderful job with redirecting and responding to staff who challenged things, or were just struggling with some of what was covered. Your ability to calmly articulate your points and help others work through the learning process of something that is new to them is admirable. Outright VT is so valuable - we are lucky to have such a wonderful organization to work with. Thank you!”

- Katherine Chobanian, School Counselor, Oxbow Union High School

“We are incredibly lucky to have you and Outright Vermont as resources for our students, staff, and families. Please know how much we value what you do.”

- Susie Merrick, Healthy Schools Coordinator, South Burlington High School