

My name is Mike McRaith, I currently serve as the high school principal of Montpelier High School, was a 2013 Rowland Fellow, I work as an instructor for Castleton continuing Ed courses, and will be serving as the VPA's new assistant executive director beginning on July 1, 2019. I am honored to have the chance to speak to the House Education Committee on behalf of the essential work that Outright Vermont conducts around the state.

Outright Vermont does crucial work not only for our LGBTQ+ students, but for the betterment of all of our students and faculty. Outright is engaged in the work of helping our schools develop empathy and knowledge to improve the lives and communities for all of us. They are the primary resource for Vermont schools for any given gender/sexuality questions and training. They provide workshops for educators on a regular basis at statewide conferences such as the Annual Rowland Conference, and are available to come to schools as well.

In just the past year, Montpelier Roxbury Public Schools have turned to Outright VT in several ways. At the high school we had a representative from Outright come to provide training and guidance to our faculty. The topic was gender bias in the workplace. The training was very well received and led to Outright Vermont coming as guest speakers in our English classes to talk about gender bias with our students as well. Outright is also supporting our elementary school in their work in introducing gender neutral bathrooms and to help incorporate gender identity into our social-emotional learning curriculum. They have also supported our middle school faculty and facilitated a train the trainer program that has led to 4 full faculty meetings on gender/sexuality across our pre-k to 12 buildings. In addition to the direct support of administration and faculty, Outright VT also serves as a beacon of community and understanding to our LGBTQ+ students as well. They do so by providing guidance to our GSA/QSA clubs, facilitating the annual Queer & Allied youth summit, a summer camp, youth nights around the state on a regular basis, and by giving support to parents/caregivers on a regular basis. Frankly, I do not know how they keep up with all that we as state expect and need from them.

Around eight years ago, when I was working as guidance counselor in Enosburg, I was helping a student who was struggling. They would often show up in my office in tears, deeply depressed, at risk for self-harm, and worried about school, home and life in general. I did my best to support the student as their guidance counselor. In their second year of high school, they came out to me. They were scared about what that meant in their life, how would they tell their parents, how would the news land in a school where no students were openly gay. I was so thankful to be able to turn to Outright for support and guidance. Not only for my young friend, but also for the parents, myself, and for our larger school community. We all needed to grow to better understand our privilege, implicit biases, and thus improve our empathy and understanding. In so doing, we all were better for it. That student graduated feeling healthy, confident, and excited about the future. We could not have done that without Outright's support and guidance.

Outright Vermont provides guidance and expertise in helping schools better represent LGBTQ+ in curriculum, resilience in the face of oppression, contributions to civil rights, science, tech, history, art, literature, and more. They provide guidance and workshop trainings for our health teachers and curriculum to be more inclusive and responsive to students' needs. They help schools navigate gender/sexuality issues around bathrooms, gendered sports teams, locker rooms, safe spaces, representation in data collection, normatively gendered forms, reports, and online student management programs, and so much more.

Outright Vermont is not only THE resource for gender/sexuality in Vermont, they also do a fantastic job in their work. All of their workshops, resources, and programming is high quality and well received by students and faculty alike. They bring professionalism, expertise, and kindness to the work they do around the state. They navigate the challenging waters of providing ad-hoc counseling, instruction, and normative fragility at any given time in their work. They model inclusion without judgement and foster wellness for our students and communities. I cannot imagine a VT learning landscape without the contributions of Outright Vermont. Having the AOE work with and support this organization seems practical and important to me and I strongly support their vital work in our communities.