

H. 128 SafeSpace Anti-Violence Program Testimony

My name is Anne Moyerbrailean, my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I am the Interim Director of the SafeSpace Anti-Violence Program at the Pride Center of Vermont. At SafeSpace we support and advocate for LGBTQ+ Vermonters who have experienced violence and/or harm. I'm here today in support of H.128.

In 2018 and 2019, an average of 43% of survivors who accessed SafeSpace's services experienced hate violence¹. From my experience with SafeSpace, this violence has most often been perpetrated by neighbors, landlords, and employers. This trend has increased during the pandemic. In the past three months, 55% of survivors have reported experiencing hate violence in Vermont.

The percentage of reported incidents have increased in the past year and so too has the severity of the cases. Based on my time on the hotline and supporting other advocates on call, the level of aggression and fear in these incidents have significantly increased. We don't yet know the full impact of the pandemic but what we are seeing is that people are in more constant proximity to people who are causing them harm and that fewer options and alternatives are available to people experiencing harm. This, on top of the everyday stressors of living in a global pandemic, is causing us to see that tensions are escalating quicker and higher than has been the case in the past several years.

And we're seeing this escalation of tensions and violence nationally. Trans people, and specifically trans women of color, have increasingly been fatally victimized over the years, and 2020 is being considered one of the deadliest years for trans and gender non-conforming people. This is an epidemic that disproportionately affects Black trans women, who - according to Human Rights Commission [research](#) - comprise 66% of LGBTQ+ victims of fatal violence in the United States.

Anti-LGBTQ+ violence is increasing nationally and in Vermont. It goes without saying that this is a concerning trend. And while the LGBTQ+ panic defense has not been used in Vermont, our state is not immune to fatal violence. Just a couple of years ago in 2016, Amos Beede, a trans man, was violently beaten to death in Burlington. Fatal violence has and unfortunately may happen again in Vermont.

Too often marginalized communities need to experience incredible trauma and violence to receive rights and protection. By passing this bill, especially now in a time where reports of violence towards LGBTQ+ people is at an all-time high, it would signal to the community that Vermont recognizes the increased threat to the safety and lives of LGBTQ+ Vermonters, and that that violence and hate are not tolerated nor excused in our state.

Thank you.

¹ SafeSpace classifies intimate partner violence and hate violence separately so IPV is not included in this statistic.