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To: House Committee on General and Housing
From: Keith E Goslant/Chair LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont
Date: April 26, 2023
Re: Support of proposed amendment to S. 103, An act relating to amending the prohibitions on discrimination.

The LGBTQIA Alliance of Vermont would like to take this opportunity to support the **Draft Language to Amend Education Harassment Statutes** currently being considered during the committee debate on **S. 103, An act relating to amending the prohibition on discrimination**.

I appreciate the committee is in the final process of discussion and mark-up so my comments will be brief.

Since the founding of Outright VT in 1989, leaders within VT's LGBTQ+ communities have been hearing the stories from our youth describing how they have encountered bullying and harassment within their school environments. Despite Vermont's commitment to working towards inclusion and equity, we have continued to hear these stories. The information gathered via the VT Department of Health Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), started in 1993 and repeated every 2 years, has supported that the stories being shared were not isolated to a particular school or region of Vermont. These incidents of bullying and harassment can, and do, occur statewide.

At times our youth have expressed how they felt unsupported by school staff/administration when they reported incidents. Some were left with the impression that what they were experiencing was not severe enough to warrant a response or intervention, or that the actions were being condoned. Although some actions could be viewed as microaggressions, being subjected to these actions on an ongoing basis can have a noticeable and adverse impact on the person to whom they are directed. The YRBS results have indicated that a higher percentage of LGBTQ+ youth have skipped school to avoid being subjected to these actions. However, in this age of social media, not all incidents occur in-person.

The language in the proposed draft would encourage, and allow schools, to view reported incidents with a broader and more comprehensive appreciation of the ongoing impact they have on LGBTQ+ youth.

While I have only specifically referenced LGBTQ+ youth, as that is the group with whom I have had direct contact, I want to acknowledge that they are not the only group subjected to bullying and harassment. Unfortunately, it is an experienced shared with other underrepresented populations, such as BIPOC, people living with a disability, new Americans, people experiencing housing insecurity, people experiencing food/economic insecurity, etc.

Thank you for including this brief statement of support in your committee discussion.

"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 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."