



Testimony in support of:
HB 7359 AN ACT CONCERNING A LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND QUEER HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES NETWORK

Submitted by:
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Dear Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Kelsey A. O'Neil and I serve as the Director of the Rainbow Center at the University of Connecticut. I am writing to give expertise regarding HB 7359: An Act Concerning a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Health and Human Services Network. If it were to be established, my professional role as director is outlined as one of the proposed representatives on the network. I strongly support HB 7359 and feel it directly aligns with the Rainbow Center's mission to advocate for the health and wellness of LGBTQ students.

I have worked in higher education serving LGBTQ populations for over seven years. As the Director of the Rainbow Center I encounter LGBTQ students in distress seeking resources on a daily basis. Often times, they are lacking support from family, juggling dual mental health diagnoses, and experiencing socioeconomic disparities compared to their heterosexual and/or cisgender peers. I have noticed a constant theme of communication in siloes throughout the State of Connecticut, even though there are many excellent agencies working towards advocating for the health and wellness of LGBTQ individuals. The establishment of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Health and Human Services Network would close such a gap and help to move multiple hard working agencies in one common direction.

HB 7359 lists conducting a needs analysis as a goal. As a director, it is my job to stay up to date on best practices and the research that informs said practice. There are limited data on LGB populations, and even less on transgender individuals. Current research suggests that massive and pervasive health disparities are present within the LGBTQ community. The Center for Disease Control published its first study on LGB high school students in 2016 and found that LGB students experience physical and sexual violence, as well as bullying, at a much higher rate than their heterosexual peers¹. LGB youth are also at an increased risk of suicide compared to

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¹ Anderson, C., & Rosenbaum, L. (2016). New CDC Survey Data Confirm the Severe Health Risks LGB Youth Face. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*.
doi:10.1037/e513032016-001

² James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.



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their heterosexual peers with a staggering 40% of respondents seriously considering and roughly 30% of respondents attempting suicide in the last year¹.

Furthermore, there is even less research on the most marginalized identities within the LGBTQ community. The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality which surveyed 27,715 transgender individuals found that 1.4% of respondents were living with HIV, which is almost five times the rate of the general U.S. population². The survey also found that transgender individuals were more than twice as likely to be living in poverty than their cisgender peers². Furthermore, that number was compounded for folks of color, which showed 43% of Latino/a, 41% of American Indian, 40% of multiracial, and 38% of Black transgender individuals living in poverty². Passing HB 7359 and forming a LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network would allow for a needs analysis to be conducted and research to be gathered specific to Connecticut.

Prior to working as the Director of the Rainbow Center, I served as an Assistant Director at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Connecticut's proven track record of support regarding LGBTQ nondiscrimination laws under housing, employment, and anti-bullying legislation was a key factor that attracted me to the job at the University of Connecticut. I wanted to live and work in a state that was leading the way for LGBTQ equality. At this time, New York and California have already established successful LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network. I believe we need to follow suit in order to lead the way to setting precedents in the future that will lead to groundbreaking change. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



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