

May 8, 2014

Vancouver Board of Education  
School District #39  
1580 West Broadway  
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 5K8

**Re: Draft Revised Policy and Regulations: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities (ACB and ACB R-1)**

Dear Board Members:

I am writing to you on behalf of Prism Services; a diversity and inclusion program at Vancouver Coastal Health.

We provide education, information and referral services on issues related to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Two Spirit (LGBTQ2S) communities. We focus on the health and wellness of the LGBTQ2S communities by providing core competency training for healthcare and social service providers; university classes; service users and community members. In addition, we connect individuals from the LGBTQ2S communities, as well as families and service providers, with supports and resources.

At Prism, we often work with agencies and service providers that provide services to some of the most marginalized individuals in the Vancouver area. Many of these individuals are experiencing multiple barriers such as poverty, homelessness and mental and physical health issues. What we have found is that LGBTQ2S individuals are over-represented in emergency social service agencies. This is supported in the literature as well. In *The State of Homelessness in Canada, 2013*<sup>1</sup>, researchers found that young people who identified as LGBTQ2S were over-represented, making up 25-40% of the homeless youth population, compared to only 5-10% of the general population.

Many of the LGBTQ2S individuals that our partner agencies serve have experienced rejection from their families and communities, often at an early age. Vulnerable LGBTQ2S youth often flee their homes, schools or communities to escape harassment, violence, bullying and intolerance from those who are supposed to support them.

As someone who has worked in community health for the last 20 years, I have seen first hand the impacts of how family rejection can affect an LGBTQ2S person.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013): *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Individuals who have been rejected from their families have higher rates of suicidality, increased illegal substance use, and are more likely to experience negative health outcomes such as HIV.<sup>2</sup>

We believe that it is integral to provide upstream supports in order to prevent negative health outcomes from occurring in the first place. One way to do this is to increase protective factors by providing supports in the schools and in the community. Research has shown that doing so can decrease some of the impacts of rejection and intolerance.<sup>3</sup> In our core competency trainings for health and social service providers, we recommend this approach as best practice.

The VSB Draft Revised Policy and Regulations on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities (ACB and ACB R-1) will help to provide some of these much-needed upstream supports. These changes will increase the safety of LGBTQ2S youth and allow them the space and autonomy to be who they are.

By focusing on supporting LGBTQ2S students, rather than simply addressing homophobic or transphobic harassment and bullying after it has already occurred, youth will have the time to focus on learning and development.

In conclusion, we strongly support this policy and we look forward to the positive changes that will come forth for LGBTQ2S youth.

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you are looking for more information or have any questions.

Sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> Caitlin Ryan, David Huebner, Rafael M. Diaz and Jorge Sanchez (2009): Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults. *Pediatrics* 2009;123:346-352

<sup>3</sup> Konishi, C., et al., Population-level evaluation of school-based interventions to prevent problem substance use among gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents in Canada, *Prev. Med.* (2013),