

**Testimony of Willie Carver
Before the
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
U.S. House of Representatives
May 18, 2022**

Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to come before you to offer my testimony on such an important issue.

My name is Willie Carver. I'm a seventeen-year teaching veteran. I sponsor multiple school groups, am published in dozens of professional organizations, am a 2021 Teacher who Made a Difference, and was chosen from 42,000 teachers as the 2022 Kentucky Teacher of the Year.

I was born to teach, and I'm good at it. I transform students' thinking, abilities, and lives.

I've always faced discrimination as a gay teacher, and I've weathered the storm because my presence saves lives. Forty percent of trans people attempt suicide, nearly all before they are 25 years old. Just one affirming adult cuts suicide attempts almost in half.

But that was before. Few LGBTQ teachers will survive this current storm. Politicizing our existence has darkened schools.

I'm made invisible. We lost our textbooks during lockdown, so I co-wrote and found free printing for two textbooks. I wasn't allowed to share them. Other schools celebrate similar work, but my name is a liability.

I'm from Mt. Sterling, KY and met the President of the United States. My school didn't even mention it in an email.

This invisibility extends to all newly politicized identities. Our administrators' new directive is "nothing racial."

Parents now demand alternative work when authors are black or LGBTQ; we are told to accommodate them, but I can't ethically erase black or queer voices.

We ban materials by marginalized authors, ignoring official processes. One parent complaint removes all students' books overnight.

Students now use anti-LGBTQ or racist slurs without consequence. Hatred is politically protected now.

My Gay-Straight Alliance, or GSA, a campus group dedicated to LGBTQ issues and safety, couldn't share an optional campus climate survey with classmates. I was told it might make straight students uncomfortable.

When posters were torn from walls, my principal responded that people think LGBTQ advocacy is "being shoved down their throats"

Inclusive teachers are thrown under the bus by the people driving it.

During a teacher shortage crisis, gay educators with perfect records are getting fired.

A Kentucky teacher's message of "You are free to be yourself with me. You matter" with pride flags resulted in wild accusations and violent threats. During this madness, his superintendent wrote to a parent, "This incident ... is unacceptable and will not be tolerated." The situation became unimaginably unsafe. The teacher resigned.

Last month, one parent's dangerous, false allegations that my GSA was "grooming" students were shared 65 times on Facebook. I felt my students and I were unsafe. Multiple parents and I asked the school to defend us. One father wrote simply, "Please do something!" The school refused to support us.

There are 10,000 people in my town. The fringe group attacking us doesn't represent most parents, who trust us.

School is traumatic; LGBTQ students are trying to survive it. They often don't. Year after year, I receive suicidal goodbye texts from students at night. We've always struggled to save those students, but now I panic when my phone goes off after 10:00.

Meryl, a gentle trans girl from Owen County High, took her life in 2020. She always wanted a GSA. Her friends tried to establish one, but the teachers who wanted to help were afraid to sponsor it. Meryl's mother, Rachelle, runs an unofficial group, PRISM, from the local library.

Forty five percent of LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide this year. We chip away at their dignity and spaces to exist. The systems meant to protect them won't even acknowledge them.

I recently attended Becky Oglesby's TED Talk. She described surviving a tornado with first graders, how they huddled, her arms around them, as school walls lifted into the darkness.

I sobbed uncontrollably. I realized that for fifteen years, I have huddled around students, protecting them from the winds, and now the tornado's here. As the walls rip away, I feel I'm abandoning them.

But I'm tired. I've fought so long, for kids to feel human, to be safe, to have hope.

I don't know how much longer I can do it.

I need you. We need you. To be brave. To face the storm with us.

Strong public schools are an issue of national security and moral urgency. Political attacks are exacerbating teacher shortages, harming our democracy and, above all, hurting our children.

We need you to pass the Equality Act, to make discrimination against LGBTQ people illegal.

We need you to pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act, to protect *all* students from harassment.

We're not asking for special treatment. We're asking for fundamental human decency, dignity, freedom from fear, and the same opportunity to thrive as everyone else.

Thank you.