

Good morning.

My name is Karlton Laster and I am here on behalf of OutFront Minnesota, our state's largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization.

I am testifying in support of SF 2431 – the establishment of the Council on LGBTQIA Minnesotans.

LGBTQ+ Minnesotans are members of every community in this state; from the Twin Cities to Greater Minnesota. We are teachers, doctors, artists, construction workers, and lawmakers in this body. LGBTQ+ Minnesotans contribute to this state's economy and its rich cultural fabric, and we deserve to be celebrated and seen as our full and authentic selves.

Unfortunately, our community has not always been recognized by those in power, and we have often had to fight to have a seat at the table for important policy decisions that impact our lives, protections, and rights. Minnesota has a rich history of LGBTQ+ advocacy, stretching back more than five decades that has helped to shape this state into what it is today.

Representation is a core value of the Democratic process; and we are heartened that with greater representation in this legislative body that our voices are being better heard in our current moment. But there is still work to be done; particularly, regarding equity and intersectionality, and implementation. LGBTQ+ Minnesotans are unique as we intersect many facets of society – from the BIPOC community to the disability community to those who are low income – and we face unique challenges that span across numerous issues including non-discrimination protections, healthcare access, schools, and investments in community services. Our voices are necessary as policy is advanced and investments are made. This Council will establish an ongoing group to advise and support our state's leaders as we seek to address inequities facing the LGBTQ+ community.

Community organizations, like ours, have long been a voice for our state's community; and we will continue to be active partners in the work ahead. But the establishment of an LGBTQ+ Council, here in the state, can act as an important complement to the work being done and provide that equity and intersectionality needed for all LGBTQ+ Minnesotans. It can help to guide and support better policy decisions, and it will ensure that the work of our state's government uplifts all Minnesotans.

I ask that you support this bill.

Thank you.