

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

There is a role for everyone to play in removing the systemic social and economic barriers facing Black LGBTQ people so that we can thrive in education, health, workforce, and the community. Channeling public resources and funds to Black LGBTQ community-based organizations, as well as Black community-based institutions, will strengthen the capacity of the Black community overall and begin to improve outcomes.

### HEALTH

State Legislature, Oregon Health Authority, Multnomah County Health Department, safety net and community-based health organizations, Oregon Health Plan, and the Oregon Health Insurance Exchange:

**Black LGBTQ youth and adults should have equitable access to fully inclusive health plans, healthy communities, and increased access to culturally specific services.**

**Data Collection:** By expanding demographic data collection to include race, sexual orientation and gender identity, health providers can better meet the needs of this population and all Oregonians. Our research highlighted a significant lack of data around transgender people of color.

**Cultural Competency and Community Health:** Medical Institutions, licensing boards, and public and private insurance agencies can better equip health care providers and administrators by instituting cultural proficiency requirements, providing ongoing trainings for health care professionals and expanding health education programs to include curriculum on the intersection of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Community health workers (CHWs) are carefully chosen community members who participate in trainings so they can promote health in their own communities. Allocating funding for a CHW program that serves Black LGBTQ communities can bridge the gap between cultures and the health care system.

**Access and Equity:** Increasing affordable health care for populations with the greatest disparities, specifically Black LGBTQ communities, will improve the overall health of Black community.

### EDUCATION

State Legislature, Oregon Department of Education, Portland Public Schools, School District Superintendents, school boards, as well as community parent and student organizations:

**Black LGBTQ youth and families have a right to a safe school environment, culturally competent teachers, self-esteem building programs, and a fully inclusive school curriculum.**

**Culturally Competent Education:** Ensuring that all teachers have adequate training in cultural competency, with a focus on race, sexual orientation and gender identity, will better equip them to support LGBTQ students academically as well as around bullying.

Mandating educational programs receiving state funding to include Black and LGBTQ history and also highlight the intersections of race, gender identity and sexual orientation will increase cultural competency in teachers and students.

**Safety in Schools:** Expanding data collection on the connections between bullying, disciplinary actions, and graduation rates, and disaggregate by race and sexual identity will help administration and teachers create effective anti-bullying policies that keep students safe in school. This effort can also be supported by funding the 2009 Safe Schools Act.

Ensure funding for an LGBTQ youth group at every public and private school with strong support for parents, students and faculty.

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

State Legislature, City of Portland, local businesses, staffing agencies, Housing Authority of Portland, other community organizations:

**Black LGBTQ people have families to support and have the right to equal relationship recognition. They need access to work that pays a living wage, provides the opportunity for upward mobility and is in a safe and healthy environment.**

**Safe Work Environment:** Expanding staff trainings to include the intersection of race, sexual orientation and gender identity will provide an additional level of education that fosters a supportive work environment for all workers.

**Job Training:** Private staffing agencies, state employment offices and other related organizations can increase outreach to Black LGBTQ people around job training opportunities.

### SOURCES:

For a full list of sources, go to: [www.ulpdx.org/news-events/](http://www.ulpdx.org/news-events/)

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

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# 2012

## ISSUE BRIEF 4: LIFT EVERY VOICE: The Black LGBTQ Oregonian Experience

Presented by Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Portland Black Chapter and The Urban League of Portland



*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

### INTRODUCTION

Black same-sex households are 9 percent of all same-sex households in the United States and the number is even greater when interracial or interethnic couples are included. As this population continues to grow, policy makers must consider the rights, needs and leadership of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities, and all LGBTQ people of color, as a way to ensure equitable and sustainable growth for all Black people and all LGBTQ people.

Elevating the visibility of this often hidden population is our first step forward. Black LGBTQ people are parents, children, and families in our community. To form solutions, we must first acknowledge that discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, compounded by racial inequity, creates far greater social and economic disparities for Black LGBTQ communities.

There is a significant lack of data available about the lives of Black LGBTQ people and families locally and across the country. To augment the data available here in Oregon, we have included both national data as well as results from a survey of 200 Black LGBTQ Oregonians and two community focus groups conducted this year by Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Portland Black Chapter (PFLAG PBC) and the Urban League of Portland.

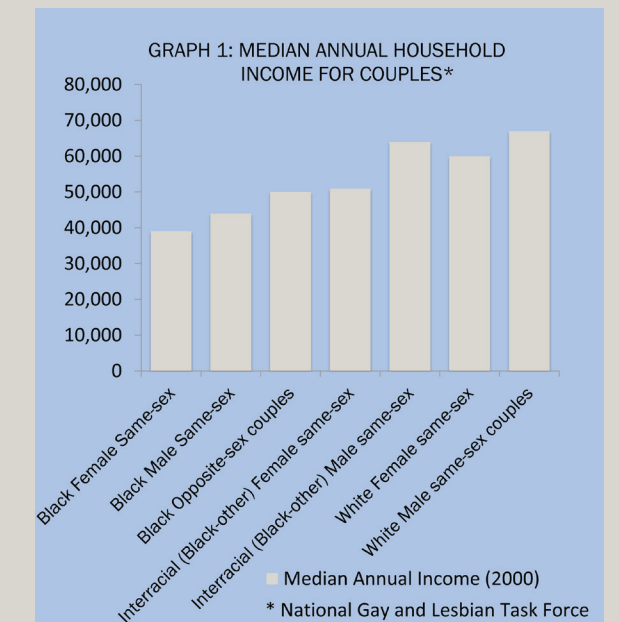
Solutions must address cumulative and interlocking disparities—from economic opportunity to safety in education—and reflect the needs, experiences, and leadership of Black LGBTQ people and families. This brief provides a snapshot of some of the social and economic inequities facing Oregon's Black LGBTQ communities and opportunities for change. While it is predominantly focused on Black LGBTQ people's experiences within Black communities, there is also much to be done within predominantly White LGBTQ organizations and communities to address racism and fully support all LGBTQ people.



### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND STABILITY

**INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT:** Locally, Multnomah County research found that 25 percent of all gay, lesbian and bisexual people of color live on less than \$20,000 (lower than White people of any orientation and straight people of color). It also found that 9 percent of general LGBT people reported being unemployed. Black LGBTQ people have disproportionately high rates of poverty and the Center for American Progress reports that Black gay and transgender Americans experience some of the highest economic disparities. Our survey found that 43.7 percent of respondents reported an annual income of \$20,000 or less and 18 percent reported being unemployed.

*Injustice at Every Turn*, a 2011 report released by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force documenting the discriminations facing transgender people, found that transgender people are nearly four times more likely than the general population to have an income of \$10,000 or less. Unemployment among transgender people of color can be up to four times the national unemployment rate.



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“I HAVE BEEN TOLD TO MY FACE THAT THE REASON I WAS TERMINATED IS BECAUSE I RECEIVED AN EMAIL THAT LED MY SUPERVISOR TO PERCEIVE I WAS GAY.”

Nationally, Black lesbians who are raising children are twice as likely to be living in poverty and are also twice as likely to be raising children as White female same-sex couples. There was a similar trend in Multnomah County and among respondents to our survey.

**WORK DISCRIMINATION:** Over one third of our respondents reported having experienced discrimination in being hired or on the job. A national survey *Say It Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud* reflected similar numbers, and reported that they perceived the discrimination was due to their intersecting identities of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

**HOMELESSNESS:** Black LGBTQ youth are at high risk for homelessness. An estimated 65 percent of homeless people are people of color and Advocates for Youth reports that 42 percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ. *Injustice at Every Turn* found that 2 in 5 Black transgender Americans are denied housing due being transgender.

**ARRESTS:** Our survey found that 30 percent of those surveyed had been arrested at least once. Further research is also needed in this area to investigate how being from two marginalized groups, LGBTQ and Black, results in greater targeting.

#### HEALTH EQUITY AND ACCESS

Black and Latino LGBTQ people fare worse in health compared with heterosexual and non-transgender people within communities of color as well as White LGBTQ people. This is true in both national data, as well as local data. Black gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are most likely to have diabetes out of any other combination of race and sexual identity at 20 percent. The next closest group was straight Black people at 8 percent. (See Graph 2)

Advocates for Youth's report found that young men of color (ages 15-22) who have sex with men are at a disproportionate risk of HIV: HIV prevalence is at 16 percent for Black young men in that category, versus 3 percent for White men. Respondents to the Oregon survey reported being diagnosed with HIV at a rate of almost 11 percent.

**CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN HEALTHCARE:** *Health Care Fairness Survey* found 99 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual people of color have experienced one or more barriers to care. They also found that while 7 percent of all transgender respondents reported medical professionals being physically rough/abusive towards them and that 26 percent used harsh/abusive language, 47 percent of all Black respondents experienced physical abuse and 34 percent of Black respondents experienced harsh/abusive language. Cultural competency is a critical component of improved health care and efforts need to focus on addressing race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and the intersections of all three.

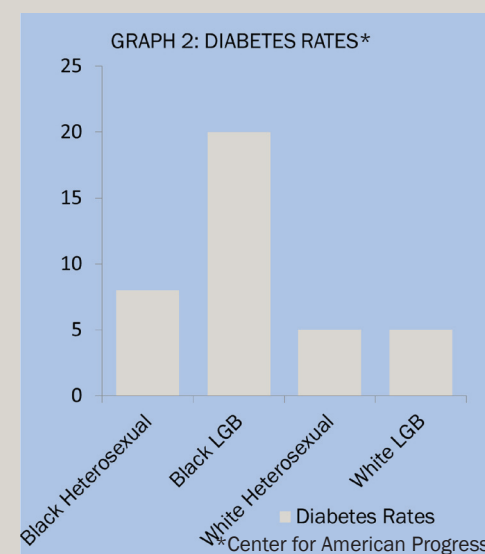
**VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT:** Over 70 percent of Black LGBTQ people we surveyed locally said that homophobia was a problem in the Black community, which is higher than some national reports. When governmental institutions have failed to address racial disparities through social service supports, Black families often rely on community support. Those informal methods of survival may be much harder to access for Black LGBTQ people and families who already feel unsafe or unheard.

The *2009 Speak Out Survey*, conducted by Multnomah County Health Department's Office of Health and Social Justice, measured the health and wellness of the County's LGBTQ community. It found that 57 percent of those surveyed had changed their daily activities because of fear, 82 percent had experienced verbal attacks, and 23 percent had experienced physical violence.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE EXPERIENCE SOME OF THE HIGHEST DISPARITIES. 97% HAVE EXPERIENCED SOME FORM OF EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION. ONE STUDY FOUND THAT TRANSGENDER PEOPLE WHO LOST THEIR JOBS DUE TO BIAS EXPERIENCED:

- 4 TIMES THE RATE OF HOMELESSNESS
- 85% HIGHER INCARCERATION RATES
- 70% MORE DRINKING OR MISUSE OF DRUGS TO COPE
- MORE THAN 2 TIMES THE HIV INFECTION RATE

THAN THOSE WHO HADN'T LOST THEIR JOBS TO BIAS.



“I WAS BULLIED TO THE FULL EXTENT FOR BEING GAY AND SEPARATELY FOR BEING BLACK.”

#### RELIGION

Religion plays a strong role in the Black community. Over half of our respondents identified as Christian, mirroring national research.

Our survey found that 70 percent of Black LGBTQ respondents were affiliated with a religion or spiritual practice, and over 65 percent indicated that religion/spirituality was very important or somewhat important in their lives. A 2000 survey conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) found that 85 percent of Black LGBTQ people were affiliated with a religion. More than half the Black LGBTQ people surveyed said their church viewed being LGBTQ as wrong and sinful, while only one fourth said their church was accepting.

#### SCHOOLS

Bullying has become a large issue nationally, with schools being one of the places marginalized youth face daily violence. Almost 60 percent of respondents to our survey said they have experienced bullying as a student.

Students who are verbally harassed about both sexual orientation and race are three times more likely to miss school than students experiencing harassment on just one of their characteristics, according to the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN). They found that students experiencing multiple forms of harassment, such as LGBTQ students of color, on average earned half a grade lower than students who did not experience harassment; both earned lower grades than students facing no harassment. Multnomah County found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people of color were more likely to have only a high school diploma/GED or less (46.3 percent) than White lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (24.7 percent).

GLSEN found that 55 percent of Black LGBTQ students had heard school personnel make sexist or derogatory gender expression remarks, and 41 percent had heard school personnel make racist remarks. Only 41 percent of Oregon survey respondents said there was an adult at their high school they did or do feel comfortable being out to. School personnel need better cultural competency training around not only race but also gender and sexual orientation.

Oregon has passed the *Safe Schools Act*, which has anti-bullying policies covering all K-12 public schools. However, there is currently no funding for implementation or monitoring of this Act in Oregon. 44 percent of students of color surveyed by GLSEN said their school had no harassment policy at all.

Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) are school clubs where students of all gender and sexual identities can come together to challenge homophobia and transphobia, and support one another. In Oregon, fewer than 1 in 4 students of color report having a GSA in their school. The majority of those surveyed who did not have a GSA felt it would have helped their experience as a Black LGBTQ person.

#### DEFINITIONS:

**Sexual identity/orientation** – Your identity in relation to who you're attracted to. Sexual orientation and gender identity are DISTINCT components of a person's identity.

**Gender identity** – Your internal sense of self; how you relate to your gender(s).

**Transgender** – Having a gender identity that is not commonly considered to match a person's assigned sex. Transgender is an umbrella term for a range of people, behaviors, expressions, and identities that challenge the gender system.

#### QUEER YOUTH ADVICE FOR EDUCATORS REPORTS:

“IN A SCHOOL OF 1,000 STUDENTS, UP TO 100 WILL BE GAY, LESBIAN, OR BISEXUAL; ANOTHER 10 WILL BE TRANSGENDER.”

#### IF THEIR LIVES ARE AVERAGE:

- 87 OF THEM WILL BE VERBALLY HARASSED
- 40 OF THEM WILL BE PHYSICALLY HARASSED
- 19 WILL BE PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED IN THE NEXT YEAR

BECAUSE OF THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER EXPRESSION.

SIXTY-TWO WILL FEEL MOSTLY UNSAFE GOING TO SCHOOL. THIRTY WILL HARM THEMSELVES IN WHAT MAY BE SUICIDE ATTEMPTS.”

“MY SPIRITUALITY AND FAITH HAS HELPED ME TO FORGIVE THE BLACK CHURCH AND ENCOURAGED ME TO CHALLENGE AND REACH OUT TO THE BLACK CHURCH.”