

OFFERED BY COUNCILOR HENRY SANTANA



CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY SIX

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING BOSTON LGBTQIA+ YOUTH COMMUNITY SPACES AND THEIR PUBLIC HEALTH BENEFITS

WHEREAS, LGBTQIA+ youth are at a much higher risk for ill mental health effects due to continual and growing exposure to social and political hostility, discrimination, and bullying. Community spaces where LGBTQIA+ youth can come together with peers and advisors can be a life-saving measure, and have been shown by studies to be profoundly positively impactful on mental health, and protective of public health concerns, particularly for transgender and gender-expansive youth; *and*

WHEREAS, In Massachusetts, 50% of LGBTQ+ youth have seriously considered suicide in the past year, more than 70% experience anxiety, and 58% report depression, per the 2024 Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth FY25 report; *and*

WHEREAS, 11% of 13-18 year-old LGBTQ+ youth in Massachusetts had attempted suicide per the most recent Trevor Project survey, with an even higher rate of 16.2% of Boston Public High School (BPS) students identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and students who describe their sexuality in some other non-heterosexual way (LGBQ+) having attempted suicide per a 2024 Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) report analyzing data from 2017, 2019, and 2021 studies; *and*

WHEREAS, Schools sometimes offer GSAs (gender and sexuality alliances), which studies have shown are positively impactful on mental health, and also reduce sexual violence against the LGBTQ+ youth who participate; GLSEN has further found that students in GSAs experienced nearly half as much in-person victimization for their sexual orientation or gender expression. However, these programs are often reliant on the availability of a staff member who has the time and willingness to volunteer; this is true for the BPS GSA program, which has led to many BPS locations lacking an active GSA for students. The Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth also notes that surveys show GSA advisors very frequently report receiving no training or mentorship in how to facilitate meetings and happenings that are productive for LGBTQIA+ youth mental health and public health concerns; *and*

WHEREAS, In-school LGBTQIA+ youth community groups are important for ease of access for many students, but bullying of LGBTQIA+ students at schools can be one of the primary threats to public health for LGBTQIA+ youth, often making schools an unsafe space to host LGBTQIA+ youth community spaces, because it makes the affected youth more visible to bullies. Further, not all LGBTQIA+ youth are enrolled in a school, and it is challenging to ensure every school will have an active program at all times, particularly for non-BPS schools where the City has more limited resources and purview to utilize. These factors necessitate also offering LGBTQIA+ youth community spaces in other accessible locations outside of schools like libraries and community centers; *and*

WHEREAS, Boston Public Libraries (BPL) and Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF) community centers are particularly apt facilities to potentially host more LGBTQIA+ youth community spaces, given their existing resources, locations throughout Boston, and aligned missions; *and*

WHEREAS, LGBTQIA+ youth community spaces hosted in non-school locations can also facilitate youth in developing greater and more durable community connections, including with youth from different neighborhoods, schools, and age groups; *and*

WHEREAS, These spaces can also serve as a way for youth to keep updated on and discuss current events and news, host health and sexual education programs oriented toward LGBTQIA+ youth, provide after-school and teen advisory programs, and facilitate special community events like LGBTQIA+ proms.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing regarding Boston LGBTQIA+ youth community spaces and their public health benefits. Representatives from the Boston Public Health Commission, Boston Public Libraries, Boston Centers for Youth and Families, the Office of Youth Engagement and Advancement, and community organizations and advocates will be invited, and members of the public are encouraged to attend and testify.

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