

Rebby Kern

My name is Rebby Kern.

Thank you to the interpreters for coming out to interpret today and for creating space and access for deaf and hard of hearing folx.

Thank you Hannah Hassan for seeing me and believing in this work and enacting the vision for an inclusive movement

Where my trans, non-binary, gender-queer, gender nonconformity, agender, Demi gender, two spirit siblings at?? I see you. You are loved. You are resilient. You are worthy. You matter.

My pronouns are she/they them. I am non-binary, biracial, pansexual person working to create more space for trans and queer youth in this world. In Charlotte. Across the Carolinas. I am the Director of School Outreach at Time Out Youth Center, the LGBTQ youth center serving the Charlotte area and surrounding counties. I am a yoga teacher at Yoga One. I am a recovery advocate. I am an ever-learning student. It is my duty to call to the attention of the people in power who work in systems creating barriers for LGBTQ youth - to call their attention to make a change. To create culture shifts. To create more space for queer and trans youth.

I work with youth in K-12 schools and holding space with educators to unlearn heteronormative, binary thinking as a means to implement new tools to create space for trans and queer youth in schools. I work with the resilient youth who lead the way for their identities to be seen. To show up fully at school, with friends, and in the workplace.

However, we find that school systems across the nation often fail students by refusing to support these youth in the ways necessary. Often youth are denied access to facilities in line with gender identity. Refusing to honor names and pronouns of youth. To deny access to queer student club in school. We find that educators are forced with the question of whether or not to hide their gender identity or sexual orientation out fear of losing their jobs. In school systems students have their gender identity and expression rejected and disciplined for not meeting gender norms.

According to GLSEN's School Climate Survey, LGBTQ youth report being twice as likely than their cisgender, straight peers to experience physical violence and mistreatment because of their gender identity and sexual orientation. We have young people navigating this system who are impacted by their own intersectionality, where many of their identities are unseen, misrepresented, ignored or blatantly discriminated against, especially our youth of color. Working in 7 counties across the Carolinas we see a wide gamut of experience from queer and trans youth.

The reality is that there are many forces playing a role: the adults in the lives of youth, educators, administrators, school counselors, mental health professionals, families. These individuals in the lives of our young adults are often perpetuating bias of their own, creating harm for youth along the way. According to GLSEN's school climate survey, 50% of students report hearing educators and staff perpetuating anti-trans or anti-LGBTQ remarks in the classroom. This doesn't just impact students, it impacts queer and trans educators who may or may not be given the support to come out or transition. There are educators who remain silent about their identities in fear that they may lose their job, or fear to report mistreatment because of retaliation or

There is power in having out educators. There is power in having curriculum and media accessible in the classroom which reflect the stories of queer and trans youth. Our youth deserve to have their who selves represented in the classroom, to see picture books with families who have two moms, two dads, an incarcerated parent, or a family dealing with deportation. Because these are our stories.

In my work it is my duty to create more space for queer and trans youth to be out, open and given a space to be seen. Gender stereotyping and foting youth into binary gender socialization is creating more harm.

I ask you to consider the conversations you have with the trans and queer folks in your life. How are you holding space for them? How can you support black and brown trans folks in your life? Where can you recognize the privileges you hold to uplift others in your life?

I make a demand of educators in the room to bring curriculum into the classroom which tells the stories of queer and trans people in a positive way. I ask you to be seen. To show yourself to the young people in your classrooms who need someone to look up to. To see powerful black and brown queer and trans leaders in the classroom and in the school.

I make a demand of adults raising children, stop kicking your children out when they share their whole self with you. If you know of young people being kicked out, in encourage you to open your homes and work to get resources to these youth facing hardship. We are a resilient community.

I make a demand of school systems to create and update policy which reflects a fully inclusive school climate for gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation for students and STAFF. To train all teachers in your schools to unlearn bias and misinformation about trans and queer youth. To hire school counselors who have a wealth of knowledge on supporting youth of color and LGBTQ youth. Our schools need out trans and queer educators!

I make a demand of the Charlotte Women's March to include trans and queer youth of color in the planning and organizing of this event - with pay. Simply asking trans and queer folks to speak is not enough. You must root your work in the uplift of all of these identities.

There is more work to do. There is more learning to do.

Thank you.