

## Protecting LGBTQ+ Youth

Imagine that you are going to school on a regular day, excited to learn. You wake up, make lunch, wear what you like and style your hair how you want, you love to express yourself. But the moment you step into school everyone stares at you disapprovingly. They whisper and laugh, as you suddenly want to cover up your outfit. As you zip up your jacket in hopes that people forget, you cannot help but wonder whether this is about your different outfit, or your “different” identity.

The goal that I would address at “The Summit of the Future” would be protecting youth LGBTQ+, this issue is part of the Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions and Reducing Inequalities sustainable development goals according to the United Nations. This goal is important to my generation and the future because these young people are not given many opportunities, they are abandoned before they even know who they are. Another reason this is important is because many kids are uneducated about what the possibilities of their identities are, or even told that expressing yourself, and being LGBTQ+ is wrong. Many kids are left unsupported by people they trusted and do not know what to do next. As an 11-year-old non-binary kid this problem is extremely important to me. The way this community is treated is unlawful, the way the laws and rules do not support us is unbelievable. We are simply trying to express ourselves. I do not want to be up late at night thinking about what the future holds for us anymore, I want things to change. That is why this goal is so important.

According to PBS news hour, this SDG is a big problem in Tallahassee, Florida, USA. According to PBS news hour, Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill stating that all lessons or talk about sexual orientation or gender identity has been banned in grades kindergarten through third, later expanded to kindergarten through eighth grade. This law bans any instruction, lesson, or talk about sexual orientation among the teachers and students, the teachers cannot even have a pride flag in their classrooms. This left many LGBTQ+ teachers and students feeling very excluded and like the law was extremely targeted towards them. Also, many officials have been debating whether the law has had an impact nation-wide,

due to many fights between school boards. According to PBS news hour “In Texas, the state code still stipulates that educational materials for people under 18, “state that homosexual conduct is an unacceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense”. This means teachers could be fined for a rainbow in their classroom, that is completely unacceptable. But this homophobia is not just specifically in Florida, this has affected other states in America, many following with similar unjust laws. For example, according to ACLU “In the last few years states have advanced a record number of bills that attack LGBTQ+ rights, especially transgender youth. There are 374 anti- LGBTQ+ bills in the USA”. This means that the amount of homophobia in US legislations has skyrocketed. We cannot overlook this anymore.

To solve this problem, it is especially important for the community to understand the situation. I would encourage the LGBTQ+ community to educate supportive friends and family if they have them. I would explain the problem to northern democratic states, specifically my home Washington, and ask for donations. Then, I would take action by using that money to build peer groups outside of schools. In these groups the LGBTQ+ community would come together and get to know each other and explain how homophobia has impacted them. Allies, parents, teachers, and the community would be allowed to come and ask questions to understand just how badly these kids have been impacted. I would ask them if they would want to donate and use more donations to possibly build a homeless shelter specifically for the LGBTQ+ community. Over 40% of all American homeless people identify as LGBTQ+, so this shelter would be especially important to the solution.

Hearing about the horrible things this community goes through and experiencing it for myself shows that this problem not only impacts the students of Florida, but all of us in the LGBTQ+ community, including me. We have come quite far, but if we cannot solve this problem future generations will feel unwelcome and like they cannot express themselves. The LGBTQ+ society will shrink, due to people being unsupported and not coming out. Others should care about this issue because their future kids, friends, and family will not be able to trust them, or be able to come out to them, if they do not show their support now by taking action. If we can succeed with this global issue, pride and expression among everyone will increase. Everyone will feel free to be who they are and feel proud about it. My hope for

the future is that global leaders will provide help by passing supportive laws. I hope that future LGBTQ+ youth will hold these leaders accountable and advocate for themselves. Mainly, I hope for everyone to feel safe and equal.

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