

AR 18 In Support of Establishing a Gender Inclusive Housing Program at the University of Texas at Austin

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WHEREAS, per the Division of Housing and Food Service website, The University of Texas has made a commitment to “provid[e] a campus environment for students... free of unsafe or hazardous conditions,”; and

WHEREAS, many transgender or gender nonconforming students feel unsafe when having to live in a room with someone with whom they do not share a mutual gender identity or expression; and

WHEREAS, this feeling arises out of fear that whomever they are assigned to live with will not accept their gender identity and may harass them physically or verbally; and

WHEREAS, transgender, nonconforming, and queer individuals have been focused on as the primary inhabitants of this housing, but is not limited to these student or of any specific gender identity; and

WHEREAS, 74% of transgender youth reported being sexually harassed at school, and 90% of transgender youth reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression¹; and

WHEREAS, staff members at the Gender and Sexuality Center report that they receive inquiries annually from incoming and prospective students about safe housing options; and

WHEREAS, an absence of gender-inclusive housing requires these students either to live in an uncomfortable and potentially unsafe environment, live in a more expensive single-person dorm room, or forgo the valuable opportunity of living on the UT campus; and

WHEREAS, the cost of a single room with a connecting or private bath costs \$12,631 per year while the cost of a shared room with a community bath costs only \$8,714 per year, representing a difference of \$3,917 and a 45% increase in cost²; and

¹ GLSEN. (2001). The 2001 national school climate survey: the school related experiences of our nation’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth.

². <http://www.utexas.edu/student/housing/index.php?site=1&score=0&id=75>

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WHEREAS, studies have found that students that live or have lived for at least one year on campus are 43% more likely to finish college than those that have never lived on campus³; and

WHEREAS, living on campus makes students more likely to graduate in four years, have better relationships with faculty and other students, get involved in more extracurricular on-campus activities, more likely to attend graduate school, and more likely to have both a higher undergraduate and graduate GPA⁴; and

WHEREAS, Gender-Inclusive Housing (sometimes referred to as Gender-Neutral or Gender-Blind Housing) is defined as a housing option in which students are not confined by gender in terms of whom they are allowed to have as a roommate, but can also highlight gender as one of their selection criteria in choosing a roommate; and

WHEREAS, a gender-inclusive housing program at the University of Texas would consist of a designated hallway or collection of dorm rooms in a university residence hall that would be otherwise identical to all other rooms in its residence hall; and

WHEREAS, thirty-two public institutions and sixty-six private institutions nationwide provide a Gender Non-Specific Housing option, including UT peer institutions of University of Michigan and University of California- Berkeley, which both have formal gender-neutral housing as part of their offerings; and

WHEREAS, other Texas institutions that have some form of gender-inclusive housing include Texas Southern University and Rice University, which offers the rooms on a case-by-case basis; and

WHEREAS, a gender-inclusive housing program at the University of Texas would be an optional program offered to anyone applying for on campus housing; and

WHEREAS, in Spring 2012, the University Residence Hall Association (URHA) conducted a survey of 1,600 university housing residence in which 64% of students said they would support

³Chickering, Arthur. *Commuting Versus Resident Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

Surveyed 169,000 students from 270 institutions and

Astin, Alexander W. *Four Critical Years*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977. Surveyed 2,000,000 students from 500 institutions.

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gender inclusive housing, while only 20% said they would oppose it, and the remaining students said they needed more information; and

WHEREAS, the URHA unanimously approved a resolution recommending that the University implement a gender inclusive housing option; and

WHEREAS, implementation of a Gender-inclusive Housing program would necessitate changes in the Housing policies, contracts, roommate-matching process and Resident Assistant training process in order to support the program; and

WHEREAS, a Task Force on this matter has been created between the queer political organization StandOut, the Gender and Sexuality Center, Student Government, the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs, and the Division of Housing and Food Services to work on creating the specific details of this pilot program on the University of Texas at Austin's campus for the 2013-2014 academic year; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that Student Government supports the implementation of a Gender-Inclusive Housing Program at the University of Texas at Austin; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Student Government supports a one-year pilot Gender-inclusive Housing Program to occur during the 2013-2014 academic year; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in conjunction with the Task Force's plans of action, the Division of Housing and Food Services will work with representatives from University Residence Hall Association as well as Student Government to implement this pilot program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Office of the Dean of Students, President William Powers, Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Gage Paine, Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement Gregory Vincent, Executive Director of Division of Housing & Food Service Floyd Hoelting, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts Mark Musick, Director of HireTexas Interview Center Karen Landolt, and Ixchel Rosal, Director of the Gender and Sexuality Center and the Multicultural Engagement Center.