

April 18, 2013

Dear Member of Congress:

We are 82 national and state organizations who are committed to ensuring that *all* students are able to pursue an education unhindered by discrimination and harassment. We write to request your support and cosponsorship of the Student Non-Discrimination Act.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act (“SNDA”) would establish a comprehensive federal prohibition against discrimination and harassment in public elementary and secondary schools across the country based on a student’s actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. SNDA would provide lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (“LGBT”) students with long overdue and much needed explicit federal protections against discrimination and harassment. The legislation also protects students who associate with LGBT people, including students with LGBT parents and friends.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act is sponsored by Senator Al Franken and Representatives Jared Polis and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. As previously introduced in the 112th Congress, the legislation garnered bipartisan support, including the support of 39 senators and 171 representatives.

There is overwhelming evidence establishing a compelling need for action at the federal level to protect LGBT students from discrimination and harassment in schools. A 2011 study of more than 8,500 LGBT middle and high school students across the US found that eight out of ten reported experiencing harassment at their school within the past year based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, and three-fifths said they felt unsafe at school because of who they are.¹ Nearly three in ten skipped at least one day of school within the previous month because of concerns for their safety. Most tragically, LGBT youth face significantly increased risks for suicide related to mental health issues that often arise from poor treatment and discrimination in schools.² It is critical that the federal government and schools act to address this very serious problem facing LGBT youth.

Further, while federal laws currently protect students on the basis of their race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin, no federal statute explicitly protects students on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The Student Non-Discrimination Act would do just that. In addition, nearly fifty years of civil rights history clearly demonstrate that laws similar to the proposed Student Non-Discrimination Act are effective in preventing discrimination and harassment from occurring in the first place by prompting schools to take proactive steps to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students who are in their care.

¹ GLSEN National School Climate Survey 2011.

² See, e.g., Massachusetts Youth Risk Survey 2007; Grossman, A.H., D’Augelli, A.R. (2007). “Transgender youth and life threatening behaviors.” *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, 37(5): 527-537.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act presents us with a historic opportunity to offer critical protections to current and future generations of LGBT youth and their student allies by ensuring that discrimination against and harassment of students on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity will have no place in our country's public elementary and secondary schools.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
African American Ministers in Action
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union
American Counseling Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
Amnesty International USA
Asian American Justice Center, member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO/Institute for Asian Pacific American
Leadership & Advancement
Association of Flight Attendants - CWA
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for American Progress Action Fund
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Child Welfare League of America
Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Education Law Center
Family Equality Council
Feminist Majority
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network)
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
GetEQUAL
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality
Healthy Teen Network
Human Rights Campaign
Immigration Equality Action Fund
Interfaith Alliance
Iowa Pride Network
Lambda Legal
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens

Learning Disabilities Association of America
LGBT Humanist Council
Log Cabin Republicans
Maryland Multicultural Coalition/State Chapter of NAME (National Association for Multicultural Education)
Minnesota AIDS Project
NAACP
National Association for Multicultural Education
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Council of Women's Organizations
National Crittenton Foundation
National Education Association
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Minority AIDS Council
National Network for Youth
National Women's Law Center
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education)
School Social Work Association of America
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Southern Poverty Law Center
The Emily Program
The Trevor Project
Transgender Law Center
Unid@s
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Wider Opportunities for Women
Women's Law Project
Youth Activism Project
YP4 Action