

April 13, 2015

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the 64 organizations below, we write to urge you to co-sponsor the Student Non-Discrimination Act (H.R. 846/S. 439) and support its inclusion in any reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) or perceived to be LGBT are subject to well-documented, pervasive discrimination, including harassment, bullying, intimidation, and violence. These students are deprived of equal educational opportunities in public schools across our nation. Numerous studies demonstrate that discrimination at school has contributed to high rates of absenteeism, dropout, adverse health consequences, and academic under-achievement among LGBT youth. When left unchecked, such discrimination can lead to – and has led to – dangerous situations for youth.

Federal statutory protections currently address discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, and disability. However, statutory protections based on sexual orientation or gender identity are limited. The Student Non-Discrimination Act would explicitly prohibit public schools from discriminating against any student on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The legislation also protects students who associate with LGBT people, including students with LGBT parents and friends.

As our nation's primary statute promoting equal access to education, it is vital that ESEA ensures that every student is able to attend school in a safe, inclusive environment free from discrimination and harassment. Decades of civil rights history show that civil rights laws are effective in decreasing discrimination against specific vulnerable groups. It is time that we extend these laws to explicitly protect LGBT youth.

Again, we urge you to co-sponsor the Student Non-Discrimination Act (H.R. 846/S. 439) and support its inclusion in any reauthorization of ESEA.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
African American Ministers In Action – Equal Justice Task Force
AIDS United
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
Anti-Defamation League
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Athlete Ally

Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Campus Pride
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Equality Federation
Family Equality Council
FORGE, Inc.
Futures Without Violence
Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Gay-Straight Alliance Network
GO! Athletes
Healthy Teen Network
Human Rights Campaign
Interfaith Alliance
International Gay and Lesbian Football Association
League of United Latin American Citizens
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Marriage Equality USA
Maryland Women's Heritage Center
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Asia Pacific American Women's Forum
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 LGBT Health
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Organization for Women
National Women's Law Center
NMAC
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Secular Coalition for America
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
SHAPE America
Southern Poverty Law Center
The Bully Project
The Trevor Project
Transathlete.com
Transgender Law Center

True Colors Fund

Union for Reform Judaism

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

Women's Law Project

Women's Sports Foundation