

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 112<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> GLSEN National School Climate Survey 2011.

<sup>2</sup> 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