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FAIR Education Act?s 1st Victory!

Mar. 23, 2011 ? Carolyn

I was so proud to testify this morning in support of the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act (SB 48), and I?m even more pleased to share the good news that in a vote of 6-3, the FAIR Education Act passed out of the California Senate Education Committee. This important bill addresses what State Senator Mark Leno, author of SB 48, called ?the conspicuous absence of protection? when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity in our education laws.

As I told the California Senate Education Committee, bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth is a pervasive problem in our schools with serious consequences for students? mental health and academic achievement. This climate of bullying and disrespect is fueled by negative stereotypes spread about LGBT people in schools and the historically inaccurate exclusion of LGBT Americans in social sciences instruction.

In contrast, accurate depictions of LGBT Americans in classroom materials teach all students to respect each other's differences, increasing all students' sense of belonging and ability to learn. Fair, inclusive lessons can make LGBT students feel less alone or isolated, improving their ability to learn, stay in school, and graduate.

In addition, GSA Network?s research with the California Safe Schools Coalition shows that the most effective strategy related to increased student safety and reduced bullying is when students report they?ve learned about LGBT people in the classroom. In schools where the majority of students report that LGBT people are included in classroom discussions, only 11% of students report being bullied based on sexual orientation or gender identity, but that number more than doubles to 24% if the majority of students in a school say they haven?t learned about LGBT people in the classroom.[1]

Especially given the opposition?s presence at the hearing, I?m so grateful for Senator Leno?s compelling voice and leadership, as well as the testimony of EQCA Executive Director Geoff Kors and our colleagues at Public Advocates, the California Teachers Association, California Federation of Teachers, Los Angeles Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, National Association of Social Workers, and National Organization for Women, and

everyone who came out to show their support for SB 48.

We?ve acted ? **now it?s time for you to speak up and make sure this bill becomes law!** Call your State Senators [1] and ask them to support the FAIR Education Act, or send them a letter through EQCA?s website [2]. If we want communities that are respectful of differences, our schools have to model that. That?s why we need the FAIR Education Act.

1 California Safe Schools Coalition (2006).LGBT Issues in the Curriculum Promotes School Safety. (California Safe Schools Coalition Research Brief No. 4). San Francisco, CA.

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Links:
[1] http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html
[2] http://www.eqca.org/makeeducationfair