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# Press Release: Seth?s Law Passes Key Legislative Committee

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GSA Network

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Seth's Law Passes Key Legislative Committee**

*AB 9, authored by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco) and co-sponsored by LGBT equality organizations, seeks to create a safer school environment for California students*

Sacramento- Today the California Assembly Education Committee passed Seth's Law in a 7-3 vote. AB 9, also known as Seth's Law, is a comprehensive bill that addresses school bullying by providing California schools with specific tools to prevent and address the pervasive problem in order to create a safe school environment for all students. The bill is named "Seth's Law" in memory of Seth Walsh, a 13 year-old gay student from Tehachapi, California, who took his life in September 2010, after facing years of relentless anti-gay harassment at school.
Wendy Walsh, Seth's mother, provided powerful testimony in support of the bill today.

"I can't bring my son back. But the California legislature can make a difference today to protect young people across our state just like Seth who are or are thought to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Schools need to take harassment and bullying seriously when parents or students tell them about it, and when they see it and hear it on the school campus," said Wendy Walsh.

The bill was authored by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano and co-sponsored by a coalition of

organizations advancing LGBT equality and justice, including Equality California, the ACLU's California Affiliates, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and Gay-Straight Alliance Network.

"As a former teacher, I know how important it is for our students to feel safe at school. Each day throughout California, LGBT youth experience harassment. Seth's Law will give schools the necessary tools to prevent any young person from being bullied, harassed or worse because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression," said Assemblymember Ammiano.

AB 9 would ensure that every school in California implements updated anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies and programs that include actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, as well as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, disability, and religion. It would also empower students and parents to know what their rights are and how to advocate for them.

"We thank Wendy Walsh for her courageous advocacy to make schools safer for all young people," said Jim Carroll, interim executive director for Equality California. "No child should ever fear for their safety at school simply because of who they are. Seth's Law will ensure that all students and school officials have the knowledge and tools they need to protect against bullying, harassment, assault and intimidation. We commend the legislators who supported this vital piece of legislation."

Schools often do not have the tools or knowledge to adequately protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students and others from bullying, which remains a serious issue across California and the rest of the nation. Students, parents, and school employees often don't know what the rules are or what to do if bullying occurs.

"Seth's Law will ensure that students know their rights and schools understand their obligations to project youth from bullying and harassment," said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. "Student activists in Gay-Straight Alliance clubs across the state are working hard to make their schools safer for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students and lawmakers owe it to them to do their part by supporting Seth's Law."

GSA Network reviewed the websites of every school district in California and found that only 34% post their Student Non-Discrimination Policy. Of those, only 84% include sexual orientation and only 4% include gender identity and gender expression. Furthermore, only 24% of school district websites in California provide information for students and parents on where and how to file a complaint.

"Public schools have tremendous power and responsibility to protect students from bullying and harassment," said Elizabeth Gill, Staff Attorney with the California Affiliates of the American Civil Liberties Union. "Better school procedures and policies to prevent and address bullying will make a safer environment for students who are suffering, and can even save lives."

In a recent national survey, 9 out of 10 LGBT students reported being harassed at school. The problem persists in California as well, with LGBT students reporting significant harassment. The California Safe Schools Coalition reported in 2010 that 42% of California students who identify as

lesbian, gay or bisexual and 62% who identify as transgender reported being harassed at least once based on gender non-conformity.

“Children should never experience fear each time they walk onto their school campuses, dreading harassment and bullying by others—yet, this is the reality for thousands of kids,” said National Center for Lesbian Rights Executive Director Kate Kendell. “Schools should be safe environments for children, and everyone should look forward to the day that Seth’s Law goes into effect, providing educators and parents the tools they need to establish a school-wide culture of respect.”

What’s more, young people often face bullying and harassment based on what their peers perceive to be their sexual orientation, regardless of whether they identify as being LGBT. According to the most recent California Healthy Kids Survey 12% of 7th graders and 10% of 9th graders reported being harassed based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

The consequences of bullying and harassment can include falling grades, depression, and risk of suicide. LGBT youth are three times more likely than their heterosexual peers to seriously consider suicide.

Under Seth’s Law, every school district in the state would:

- Create strong and clear anti-harassment policies and programs, if they don’t have them already.
- Have a system in place to ensure that all reports of harassment are taken seriously, addressed quickly, and that parents and students understand the process of making these complaints.
- Explain the harmful impact of bullying and discrimination to students and staff.
- Provide ongoing professional development for teachers, school counselors and administrators about identifying and stopping harassment and discrimination and creating a school-wide culture of inclusion and respect for difference.

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The three California Affiliates of the **American Civil Liberties Union** (ACLU) are part of the nationwide, nonpartisan organization with more than 550,000 members dedicated to the defense and promotion of the guarantees of individual liberty secured by state and federal Constitutions and civil rights statutes.
www.ACLUNC.org [7]

**Equality California** is the largest statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights advocacy organization in California. Over the past decade, Equality California has strategically moved California from a state with extremely limited legal protections for LGBT individuals to a state with some of the most comprehensive civil rights protections in the nation. Equality California has passed more than 70 pieces of legislation and continues to advance equality through legislative advocacy, electoral work, public education and community empowerment.
www.EQCA.org [8]

**Gay-Straight Alliance Network** (GSA Network) is a national youth leadership organization that empowers youth activists to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools by training student leaders and supporting student-led Gay-Straight Alliance clubs throughout the country. In California alone, we have brought GSA clubs to 56% of public high schools, impacting more than 1.1 million students at 850 schools. GSA Network's youth advocates have played a key role in changing laws and policies that impact youth at the local and state level. GSA Network is also the founder of the Make It Better Project, which aims to stop bullying and prevent suicide.
www.gsanetwork.org [9]

**The National Center for Lesbian Rights** is a national legal organization committed to advancing the human and civil rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community through litigation, public policy advocacy, and public education. www.NCLRrights.org [10]

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