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Seth's Law Passes Critical Senate Committee ??

AB 9, authored by Assemblymember Ammiano and sponsored LGBT equality organizations, seeks to create a safer school environment for California students ??

Sacramento--The Senate Education Committee today passed Seth's Law (AB 9) in a 7-2 vote. Seth's Law is designed to address the pervasive problem of school bullying by providing California schools with tools to create a safe school environment for all students. The bill is

authored by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco) and co-sponsored by a coalition of organizations advancing LGBT equality, including Equality California, the ACLU of California, National Center for Lesbian Rights, Gay-Straight Alliance Network, and The Trevor Project. The bill is named 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," Walsh said.??

AB 9 would ensure that every school in California implements updated anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies that include actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, and religion or association with one or more of these groups. It would also inform students and parents of their rights and how to address incidents of bullying.

"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.??

"Every day thousands of children go to school fearing for their safety simply because of who they are," said Jim Carroll, Interim Executive Director of Equality California. "California schools must do more to protect students against bullying and harassment. Seth's law will provide schools with the knowledge and tools they need to effectively address bullying." ??

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. ??

"Bullying can have serious and tragic consequences, particularly for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender," said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. "We must take pro-active steps to ensure that California's schools are safe for every student. Seth's Law will provide critical support for student activists in Gay-Straight Alliance clubs across the state working to make their schools safer."??

"Public schools have tremendous power and responsibility to protect students from bullying and harassment," said Elizabeth Gill, Staff Attorney with the ACLU of California. "Better school procedures and policies to prevent and address bullying will make a safer environment for students who are suffering."??

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 fear going to school, and yet that is the daily reality for thousands of California students who face relentless harassment and bullying,” said National Center for Lesbian Rights Executive Director Kate Kendell. “We must do everything we can to address the root causes of bullying and create inclusive and respectful school environments.”??

“When schools have the resources to protect young people who are bullied or harassed, it greatly affects the psychological well-being of all students, including LGBT students,” said David McFarland, Interim Executive Director of The Trevor Project. “When passed, Seth’s Law will help encourage a safer and healthier school environment, benefitting all California youth.” ??

The consequences of bullying and harassment can include falling grades, depression, and risk of suicide. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are four times more likely than their heterosexual peers to attempt suicide.

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 [7] ?"> *www.eqca.org [8] ??*

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of California is 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.ACLU.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]

?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, GSA Network has 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 operates the National Association of GSA Networks, which unites more than 30 statewide networks of GSA clubs throughout the country. GSA Network is also the founder of the Make It Better Project, which aims to stop bullying and prevent suicide. www.gsanetwork.org ?? [11]

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ youth. Every day, The Trevor Project saves young lives through its free and confidential lifeline, in-school workshops, educational materials, online resources and advocacy. www.TheTrevorProject.org [12]

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http://www.gsanetwork.org [13]

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