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Assembly Education Committee Passes Landmark LGBT Education Bill

Legislation sponsored by Equality California and Gay-Straight Alliance Network aims to stop discriminatory education and promote school safety

Sacramento – Yesterday a bill that would require schools to fairly and accurately portray the historic contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in social science instruction passed the Assembly Education Committee in a 7-4 vote. The Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act (SB 48), authored by Senator Mark Leno (D-San Francisco), would also add sexual orientation and gender identity to the state's existing anti-discrimination protections that prohibit bias in school activities, instruction and instructional materials.

Studies have shown that inclusion of LGBT people in instructional materials is linked to greater student safety and lower rates of bullying. The bill is co-sponsored by Equality California and Gay-Straight Alliance Network.

The FAIR Education Act would bring classroom instruction into alignment with existing non-discrimination laws in California and would add LGBT to the existing list of underrepresented cultural and ethnic groups, which are covered by current law related to inclusion in textbooks and other instructional materials in schools. By including fair and accurate information about LGBT people and history in instructional materials, SB 48 will improve student safety, reduce bullying, enrich the learning experiences of all students, and promote an atmosphere of safety and respect in California schools.

“We thank the members of the Education Committee for recognizing the need to educate students about the historic contributions of LGBT leaders to California and the struggle for LGBT equality,” said Jim Carroll, Interim Executive Director of Equality California. “This legislation will ensure all students understand the diversity of our state and its history, and it will foster greater awareness, respect and safer schools for all students.”

“We, and our LGBT youth members who lobbied and testified for this bill, are thrilled to see the Assembly Education Committee take this step towards a fair and accurate education for all of California’s students,” said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. “By including LGBT Americans in instructional materials, the FAIR Education Act will reduce bullying, increase safety for all students, and teach students to respect each other's differences.”

“Most textbooks don’t include any information about LGBT historical figures or the LGBT civil rights movement, which has great significance to both California and U.S. history,” said Senator Leno (D-San Francisco). “This selective censorship sends the wrong message to all young people, and especially to those who do not identify as straight. We can’t tell our youth that it’s OK to be yourself and expect them to treat their peers with dignity and respect while we deny them accurate information about the historical contributions of Americans who happened to be LGBT.”

The bill now heads to the Assembly floor.

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Equality California (EQCA) 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 [3]

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 [4]

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