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Legislation sponsored by Equality California and Gay-Straight Alliance Network aims to end LGBT history exclusion in education and to promote school safety

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Sacramento – Today, the California State Assembly in a 49-25 vote passed a bill that would require schools to fairly and accurately portray the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights movement and the historic contributions of the diverse LGBT community in social science instruction. 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 struggle of the multicultural and multiethnic LGBT community in California is one of the greatest stories yet to be told,” said Equality California Executive Director Roland Palencia. “The FAIR Education Act will ensure that public schools acknowledge the heroism of individuals and communities who in spite of countless barriers continuously overcome adversity.”

Palencia added, “For decades, LGBT leaders have worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for all Californians. LGBT leaders were heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the farm workers’ movement, the women’s movement, and have built health and human services institutions that now serve millions of Californians. It is time for history to accurately depict our community’s contributions.”

The FAIR Education Act would bring classroom instruction into alignment with existing non-discrimination laws in California and would add the LGBT community 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 the rich and diverse history of LGBT people in instructional materials, SB 48 will enrich the learning experiences of all students and promote an atmosphere of safety and respect in California schools.

“This is a victory not only for the LGBT youth in California who have been fighting to be heard in Sacramento and represented in their history classes, but also for all California youth who deserve to learn a fair and accurate account of California and US history,” said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. “By passing the FAIR Education Act, the Assembly has taken an unprecedented step to reduce bullying, increase safety for all students, and teach students to respect each other's differences.”

“We are selectively censoring history when we exclude LGBT Americans, or any other group of people, from our textbooks and instructional materials,” said Senator Mark Leno (D-San Francisco). “We can’t tell our youth that it’s OK to be yourself and expect them to treat their peers with dignity and respect when we deliberately deny them accurate information about the historical contributions of Americans who happened to be LGBT.”

The bill now heads to the Governor’s desk.

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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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