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Authored by Assemblymember Atkins, AB 887 will strengthen protections based on gender identity and gender expression

Sacramento - Today, the California State Senate passed the Gender Nondiscrimination Act (AB 887) in a vote of 25-13. The bill is authored by Assemblymember Toni Atkins (D-San Diego) and is sponsored by Equality California, Transgender Law Center, and Gay-Straight Alliance Network. AB 887 seeks to strengthen employment, housing, and other civil rights protections for all Californians, particularly those who face discrimination based on gender identity and expression.

"AB 887 protects all Californians. No matter your skin color, your age, where you come from or whether you're gay, straight, or transgender, we are all protected by the same rights," said Assemblymember Atkins. "We share equal protection in employment, housing, and education. This bill ensures that no one is left out."

While California anti-discrimination laws already define "gender" to include a person's gender identity and gender expression, AB 887 explicitly enumerates gender identity and expression as protected categories in a number of state codes to provide clarity to those who are victims of unlawful discrimination as well as for business owners, employers and other entities required to comply with the anti-discrimination protections.

"All hardworking people in California, including transgender people, should have an equal opportunity to earn a living and provide for their families," said Roland Palencia, Executive Director for Equality California. "No one should have to live in fear of being fired from a job or denied housing simply because of who they are. This bill reduces the harm from discrimination and the costs associated with litigation. We thank Assemblymember Atkins for authoring this important piece of legislation."

In 2009, the Transgender Law Center released its "State of Transgender California" report. The report revealed overwhelmingly that Californians who experience discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression at work or elsewhere often times do not file complaints because they are unaware that they are protected by non-discrimination laws.

"California has been fortunate to have laws protecting our workers and students from discrimination for several years," said Masen Davis, Executive Director of the Transgender Law Center. "Unfortunately those rights have been hidden, making it hard for employees to know they are protected and for employers to know their responsibilities. The Gender Nondiscrimination Act brings our rights out of the closet and brings California one step closer to achieving its potential."

More than 100 cities across America and hundreds of employers already provide clear non-discrimination protections based on gender identity and gender expression. Cities that list them as separate protected categories in non-discrimination ordinances include Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Oakland and West Hollywood.

"All students deserve to be safe and free of discrimination in their schools," said Gay-Straight Alliance Network Executive Director Carolyn Laub. "The Gender Nondiscrimination Act ensures that confusing legal wording will no longer stand between California's transgender and gender-nonconforming students and their right to a safe learning environment."

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The Transgender Law Center (TLC) is a civil rights organization advocating for transgender communities. TLC uses direct legal services, education, community organizing and advocacy to transform California into a state that recognizes and supports the needs of transgender people and their families. www.transgenderlawcenter.org [4]

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 [5]

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 [6]

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