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LGBT Equality Organizations Applaud California Senate Passage of Seth's Law

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Sacramento - Today, the California State Senate approved Seth's Law (AB 9) in a 24-14 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, CA, who took his life in September 2010, after facing years of relentless anti-gay harassment at school.

"I want to thank my colleagues in the Senate for taking this important step forward to ensuring that schools have the necessary tools to prevent any young person from being bullied, harassed or worse because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. As a former teacher, I know how important it is for our students to feel safe at school. We have a moral duty to our youth to prevent bullying and Seth's Law will help schools protect students, and prevent and respond to bullying before a tragedy occurs." said Assemblymember Tom Ammiano.

"Public schools have tremendous power and responsibility to protect students from bullying and harassment," said James Gilliam with the ACLU of California, and director of the Seth Walsh Students' Rights Project at the ACLU of Southern California. "Better school procedures and policies to prevent and address bullying will make a safer environment for students who are suffering."

"All students deserve to receive an education without fearing for their safety because of who they are," said Roland Palencia, Executive Director of Equality California. "Seth's law is an important

step forward in ensuring schools have the knowledge and tools they need to prevent bullying. We thank Assemblymember Ammiano, Assembly Speaker Pérez, the LGBT Caucus and allied lawmakers for championing this critical piece of legislation."

"All students should be able to learn in an environment that is safe and free from bullying and harassment, but that is not the reality for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students," said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. "Seth's Law will help our schools recognize and address the serious and often devastating consequences of bullying in California's schools."

"Senate passage of AB9 is especially timely with National Suicide Prevention Week about to begin. It signals that California lawmakers are invested in the safety of students and want teachers and staff to be better prepared to address the harmful consequences of persistent bullying and harassment," said David McFarland, Interim Executive Director and CEO of The Trevor Project.

Over the past several months, "Seth's Law" has raised an important discussion about the need to help schools protect LGBT students and other vulnerable youth from bullying. While California already prohibits school harassment, 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 the state 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.

In a recent national survey, nine 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 said they had been harassed at least once based on gender non-conformity.

According to the California Healthy Kids Survey, 27% of students who reported harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation said they missed school at least one day during the past 30 because they felt unsafe. Increased truancy rates lead to a lack of funding for schools.

Besides truancy, the consequences of bullying and harassment can include falling grades, depression, and risk of suicide. Students who reported harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were four times more likely than their heterosexual peers to attempt suicide.

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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[6]*

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*

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[7]*

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 [8]*

The Trevor Project *is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, ages 13-24. Every day, The Trevor Project saves young lives through its free and confidential lifeline, in-school workshops, educational materials, online resources and advocacy. The organization has recently been named a "Champion of Change" by the White House for leadership and innovation in suicide prevention. For more information, visit* www.TheTrevorProject.org [9]
http://www.gsanetwork.org [10]

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