Published on *Gay-Straight Alliance Network* (http://www.gsanetwork.org)

Bullied Teen's Mother Marks Seth's Law Signing

Wendy Walsh, the mother of Seth Walsh, after whom the recently signed Seth's Law is named, visited San Francisco this week to mark the bill becoming law.

The legislation, authored by openly gay Assemblyman Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco), is designed to help protect students from bullying. Seth, Walsh's 13-year-old gay son, hanged himself last year at their Kern County home after years of harassment.

Walsh appeared with Ammiano and others at a Monday, October 17 press conference on the steps of the State Building. She said if Ammiano's bill had been in place while her son was alive, "The school would have taken my complaints seriously."

The school's lack of action "cost my family a big tragedy with Seth taking his life," she said.

"I can't bring my son back," Walsh said in a statement released by Ammiano's office. "But we have made 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."

Governor Jerry Brown signed Seth's Law, Assembly Bill 9, on October 9, the last day for taking action on bills. It's set to take effect in July.

While California already prohibits school harassment, Ammiano said the laws are "a little murky."

Many schools don't have the tools or knowledge to adequately protect LGBT students and others from bullying. Students, school staff, and others often don't know what the rules are or what to do if bullying occurs, a statement from Ammiano's office Monday said.

Seth's Law tightens anti-bullying policies by ensuring that all schools have clear policies and shorter timelines for investigating bullying allegations. Ammiano said among improvements included in his legislation, schools will have to make clear to bullied students who they can talk to.

"In San Francisco, we're doing quite well" at addressing bullying and harassment, Ammiano said.

Survey data has shown the city's LGBT students aren't immune from the problems, but for years the San Francisco Unified School District has offered tools and resources, including a pioneering website, aimed at making local schools safer.

In other parts of the state, though, Ammiano said Seth's Law would be "the first step."

He said he's working on additional legislation to address bullying, including "alternative discipline" for perpetrators. That could include using an incident "as a teaching tool," rather than just suspending a student.

Seth's Law was co-sponsored by Equality California, the American Civil Liberties Union of California, National Center for Lesbian Rights, Gay-Straight Alliance Network, and the Trevor Project.

Laura Valdez, interim executive director of GSA Network, said the new law sends an important message to school administrators, staff, and students in that allegations of bullying must be taken seriously.

Oct. 20, 2011
News Article
http://www.ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=6131 [1]
Bay Area Reporter
Seth Hemmelgarn

Source URL: http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/bullied-teens-mother-marks-seths-law-signing/102011

Links:
[1] http://www.ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=6131