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Youth to Meet with Elected Officials to Advocate for School Safety & Equality

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Youth to Meet with Elected Officials to Advocate for School Safety & Equality
Press conference at 11:00 with legislators and youth speakers

April 30, 2012, Sacramento – Nearly 60 high school students are in Sacramento today to talk to state lawmakers and administrators about the harm caused by extreme discipline policies, like “zero tolerance,” and the need to implement protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth. The students attending the 7th annual Queer Youth Advocacy Day are LGBT and straight ally youth activists representing Gay-Straight Alliance clubs from towns and cities across state.

Students will rally at the State Capitol's north steps at 11:00 a.m. where they will be joined by Senator Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) and Assemblymembers Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco), Toni Atkins, (D-San Diego), Betsy Butler (D-Los Angeles), Roger Dickinson (D-Sacramento), Rich Gordon (D-Menlo Park), and Ricardo Lara (D-Bell Gardens).

Following the rally, students will visit their representatives' offices to advocate for AB 1729 and AB 2242, two bills that would address the use of extreme and unfair discipline policies, under which LGBT students, students of color, and students with disabilities suffer disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion. Students will also meet with state officials from the California Department of Education to discuss the implementation of existing safe schools laws, including the Gender Nondiscrimination Act and the FAIR Education Act. Both laws were passed last year with support from youth advocates during the 2011 Queer Youth Advocacy Day.

"Students shouldn’t be denied an education just because of who they are, but for many LGBT

youth in California that's the reality created by unfair discipline policies and schools that fail to protect students from harassment," said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. "The courageous youth leaders in the Capitol today are building on years of student advocacy in California to demand that all districts respect the letter and spirit of our hard-won safe schools laws."

"While LGBT youth today are growing up in an era of greater awareness and acceptance of LGBT people, schools are still ill-prepared to fully ensure the emotional and psychological well-being and development of LGBT students. We're proud to join with our partners today to empower courageous lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people to tell their stories and make change that will impact their lives and the lives of the next generation of LGBT Californians for years to come," said Equality California Board President Clarissa Filgioun.

"Along with our partners, The Trevor Project is incredibly proud of the empowered youth who advocate for their rights to safety and equal treatment in school and in their communities on Queer Youth Advocacy Day, " said Abbe Land, Executive Director and CEO of The Trevor Project.

"The young people of Queer Youth Advocacy Day are leading the charge for equality and social justice," said Masen Davis, Executive Director of Transgender Law Center. "We thank GSA Network and all our partners in helping to empower youth to advocate for themselves and their communities at the Capitol."

"I'm so proud of the young people at Queer Youth Advocacy Day who joined LGBT equality organizations to create safe and respectful school communities for all students," said James Gilliam, Deputy Executive Director for the ACLU of Southern California.

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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 870 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 35 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[1]

Equality California Institute is the sister organization of Equality California – the state's largest advocacy organization working to achieve full and lasting equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Over the past decade, the Equality California Institute and Equality California have strategically moved California from a state with extremely limited legal protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to a state with some of the most comprehensive protections in the nation. The Equality California Institute educates lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and the public at large about issues impacting lesbian,

gay, bisexual and transgender people to advance pro-equality policies and change hearts and minds in favor of equality. Equality California Institute organizes and empowers individuals, communities and allied groups to work proactively for fairness, equality and justice. www.eqca.org [2]

Transgender Law Center works to change law, policy, and attitudes so that all people can live safely, authentically, and free from discrimination regardless of their gender identity or expression. www.transgenderlawcenter.org [3]

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ youth. Every day, The Trevor Project saves young lives through its free and confidential lifeline, in-school workshops, educational materials, online resources and advocacy. www.TheTrevorProject.org [4]

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of California is part of the nationwide, nonpartisan organization with more than 550,000 members across the country 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

http://www.gsanetwork.org/events/queer-youth-advocacy-day [5]
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