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Audit Will Hold Schools Accountable for Protecting All Students

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Audit Requested to Hold Schools Accountable for Protecting All Students

Legislators and LGBT Organizations Question School Districts' Compliance with Anti-Bullying Laws in California Schools

UPDATE: Audit request approved in 9-4 bipartisan vote by Joint Legislative Audit Committee.

(Sacramento) Prompted by recent reports of bullying and harassment against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, Equality California and Gay-Straight Alliance Network have partnered with Assemblymembers Ricardo Lara (D-Bell Gardens) and Betsy Butler (D-Los Angeles) to ask the Joint Legislative Audit Committee to authorize an audit of California school districts and to report on the level of compliance with laws that protect students from discrimination, bullying and harassment.

??"For over fifteen years, youth leaders in Gay-Straight Alliance clubs across the state have come to Sacramento and successfully urged their legislators to pass life-saving protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth," said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. "But more often than not, these students return to school only to face more harassment and bullying, with administrators who ignore the law and don't enforce LGBT students' right to a safe learning environment. We need this state audit in order to deliver on California's hard-won promise to keep students safe."??

Gay-Straight Alliance Network, with its partners, has successfully sponsored ten pieces of legislation to address issues of LGBT student safety, including last year's Seth's Law (AB 9) and the earlier groundbreaking California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (AB 537), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. While all schools are required to implement these laws, reports from students show a patchwork in

which some school districts comply and others ignore or subvert the law. The audit is the first step in identifying non-complying districts and providing a pathway to compliance. ?

?"Students must not be allowed to suffer simply because administrators lack the will or ability to protect them," said Clarissa Filgioun, Equality California board president. "We have the laws we need to make a real impact in reducing bullying and discrimination, but we can't let safety be an empty promise we make students. This audit will let us know how safe our youth really are."??

According to data from the California Healthy Kids Survey, every year over 200,000 students are harassed because of their sexual orientation, despite the various laws that should promote and protect student safety in schools.

??"While we have made great strides legislatively to curve bullying and harassment in schools, recent incidents against LGBT students point to piecemeal compliance that demands attention. It?s devastating for a child to feel unsafe in an environment where they are supposed to feel protected. This audit will help identify gaps in compliance and provide solid recommendations for improvement,? said Assembly Member Lara.

??"Schools should be a place of learning and acceptance for students,? said Assembly Member Betsy Butler. ?Despite significant improvement, too often school becomes a place of intimidation and harassment for LGBT kids. This audit will ensure every student in California is treated with equality and fairness.??

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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 880 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 37 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 (EQCA) is the largest statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender advocacy organization in California. Over the past decade, Equality California has 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 human rights protections in the nation. Equality California has partnered with legislators to successfully sponsor more than 85 pieces of pro-equality legislation. EQCA continues to advance equality through legislative advocacy, electoral work, public education and community empowerment. www.eqca.org[2]

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