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# Standing with my son

Jun. 12, 2013 ? Catherine Lee

*This morning, the California Senate Education Committee passed AB 1266, the School Success and Opportunity Act, by a vote of 5-2.[1] It now heads to the Senate floor. 16-year-old Manteca High School student Ashton Lee (left in photo), joined by his mother (right), testified in support of the bill.*

My name is Catherine Lee and I am the proud parent of Ashton Lee. Ashton and our family began his transgender journey from female to male after years of trying to figure out why he felt so different. I sometimes struggle with using his chosen name and pronoun but it is a process that I chose to support him in. I am still getting used to the changes and often have mixed feelings, but my love for my child wins every time and I step back on the path with a renewed passion to walk alongside him on his journey.

Ashton is an avid learner with a longstanding passion for education and sports. As a transgender student there have been many challenges along his educational journey. His school's policy of splitting males and females into different physical education classes, and making Ashton participate with the girls, has caused Ashton considerable problems in terms of his emotional health. Ashton has approached school administrators with requests to be allowed to participate in sports as himself. School officials, while sympathetic, don't know how to respond and have

therefore denied his requests. This policy, while not intentionally harmful, has caused my transgender child harm and affected his entire educational experience.

It is so important to me that Ashton graduate from high school and continue on with higher education. I was a broken child and know first hand the benefits that my Master's degree in Counseling Psychology has brought to myself, my family and my community. In our home we have a saying that school is more than 123 and ABC it is about learning how to navigate complex social interactions and developing the mindset that difficult situations can be overcome through persistence and compassion.

When Ashton was younger we saw the problems he experienced when participating in organized school sports and enrolled him into private martial arts classes. As a student and teacher of martial arts Ashton has learned that physical sports must be paired with an emphasis on character development. Having a fair chance to play sports as himself -- as a boy -- will not fix all the problems Ashton faces, but it is the right thing to do and will make a big difference to Ashton as he learns how to become a man of character.

The School Success and Opportunity Act will make a tremendous difference for my transgender child and my family. AB 1266 would make sure Ashton's school knows how to handle his requests, allowing him to benefit from physical education classes and remain on target for graduation with his classmates.

I am so proud of Ashton today for speaking before the Senate Education Committee with a powerful voice in support of AB 1266. It has been amazing to have so many individuals come up to Ashton and acknowledge the impact his statements had on them and offer him information about resources to support transgender individuals. It looks promising that every student regardless of their gender identity will be given a chance to experience an enriching educational experience. The next steps will be on our minds and we are excited to be able to put a human face to such an important issue for transgender students.

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**Source URL:** http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/blog/standing-my-son/06/12/13

**Links:**
[1] http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/bill-supporting-transgender-students-goes-senate-floor/061213