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

Bill Supporting Transgender Students Goes to the Senate Floor

Jun. 12, 2013

SACRAMENTO-Today the California Senate Education Committee passed AB 1266 (Ammiano), the School Success and Opportunity Act, a bill that provides crucial support for transgender students, by a vote of 5-2. The bill will ensure that California public schools understand their responsibility for the success and well-being of all students, including transgender students, and will allow transgender students to fully participate in all school activities, programs, and facilities. AB 1266 is authored by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano, and is co-authored by Senator Mark Leno, Senator Ricardo Lara and Assemblymember Toni Atkins.

AB 1266 would ensure that students who are transgender have equal access to facilities and activities like sports teams that match their gender.

?All I want to do is go to school and have the same opportunity to succeed as everyone else,? said Ashton Lee, a 16-year-old transgender boy from Manteca who came to Sacramento with his mother to testify at the hearing. ?I just want to be treated the same as all the other boys, but my school forces me to take P.E. in a class of all girls and live as someone I?m not. Every day in that class leaves me feeling isolated and alone, making it extremely difficult to learn.?

The Los Angeles Unified School District, which is the second largest school district in the country and serves more than 670,000 students, successfully implemented a policy virtually identical to AB 1266 in 2005 to ensure that no student is left out.

?Families matter in LAUSD. We?ve worked with students and families closely to ensure that our policies related to gender identity are successful, welcomed by students, and supported by parents," said Judy Chiasson, Program Coordinator for Human Relations, Diversity and Equity at the Los Angeles Unified School District. "In addition to longstanding policies banning bullying, harassment, and discrimination, LAUSD has had specific policies banning discrimination based on gender identity for nearly a decade. We have firsthand experience recognizing and valuing the diversity of school communities, which ultimately enhances and enriches the lives of all our students."

The Los Angeles Times recently editorialized in support of AB 1266, noting that ?discomfort is not a valid reason for discrimination.?

California law already prohibits discrimination in education, but transgender students are often still unfairly excluded from physical education, athletic teams, and other school activities and facilities. This exclusion negatively impacts students? ability to succeed in school and graduate with their class. For example, physical education classes help students develop healthy fitness habits and teach values like teamwork and fair competition - and P.E. credits are required, so students cannot graduate without them.

Under AB 1266, California?s public schools would be required to respect a transgender student?s identity in all school programs, activities, and facilities. The bill will provide guidance to district and school lead-ers about how to meet their obligations to protect the safety and well being of all students, including those that are transgender.

?It?s graduation season, a time when students across the state should be celebrating the future they?ll build with their high school diploma. But right now, schools are denying too many young people, especially transgender youth, that opportunity to earn their degree and succeed -- simply because of who they are,? said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network.

The bill is supported by the ACLU of California, Equality California, Gay-Straight Alliance Network, Gender Spectrum, the National Center for Lesbian, Rights, Transgender Law Center, and 34 other organizations, including the California Teachers Association, the California Federation of Teachers, and the California State PTA.

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