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Senator Lara Introduces Legislation to Improve Safety and Prevent Bullying in California Schools

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Senator Lara Introduces Legislation to Improve Safety and Prevent Bullying in California Schools

Proposed bill addresses shortfalls in existing school safety and nondiscrimination law enforcement and implementation in California schools

(Sacramento) Prompted by the findings of the School Safety and Nondiscrimination Laws Audit released in 2013 which reported that school bullying prevention efforts are falling short, today State Senator Ricardo Lara and Equality California announced the introduction of new legislation, SB 840, that would improve the handling of bullying and discrimination incidents in schools.

?Though California has moved in a progressive direction to pass laws to protect our youth from bullying and harassment, last year?s audit highlights the unacceptable gap between policy making and the implementation of effective bullying prevention programs in our public schools,? stated Senator Lara. ?Student success depends on student safety ? that?s why I?ve introduced this legislation to implement the Auditor?s recommendations to effectively reduce incidents of bullying in schools.?

?No student who feels different should be afraid to go to school and we know that LGBT students are frequently the targets of bullying,? said EQCA Executive Director John O?Connor. ?This bill would provide schools with the tools they need to combat bullying and discrimination. Under Senator Lara?s leadership, this bill will ensure that schools understand their obligations to protect our students and provide assurance students and their families.?

The proposed bill would improve the handling of bullying and discrimination in public schools by requiring training for prevention and handling of incidents, procedures for referring victims to counseling services, and reporting all incidents of bullying, not just those that lead to suspension or expulsion.

?The Audit demonstrated that we are at a crossroads in California when it comes to student safety. We applaud Senator Lara?s leadership, which provides an opportunity to enact the Auditor?s recommendations and deliver on the promise that every student should feel safe at school and have the opportunity to succeed,? said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of GSA Network.

Bullying and harassment in schools is occurring at alarming rates in California. While students are bullied for a variety of reasons, data has shown nearly 200,000 students in California schools are harassed because of sexual orientation. These statistics translate to multiple negative consequences for students, including higher risk for poor academic performance, depression, suicide and substance abuse. The cumulative cost to school districts is an estimated minimum of $39.9 million each year due to school absences when students feel unsafe to attend school for fear of being bullied.

In 2012, EQCA and GSA Network joined then Assemblymembers Ricardo Lara and Betsy Butler requesting an audit by the State Auditor that reviewed current state laws on the issue and recommended improvements that can increase prevention. The report was released in 2013 and found that while a majority of districts and schools have implemented some nondiscrimination policies, many lacked adequate enforcement measures. Additionally, the audit revealed that California law was not fully aligned with federal Department of Education nondiscrimination policy.

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 90 pieces of pro-equality legislation. EQCA continues to advance equality through legislative advocacy, electoral work, public education and community empowerment. www.eqca.org [3]

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 61% of public high schools, impacting more than 1.2 million students at 940 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. www.gsanetwork.org [4]

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http://www.eqca.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=kuLRJ9MR... [5]

Press Release
Proposed bill addresses shortfalls in existing law

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