



April 9, 2014

United States Congress  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Member of Congress:

As the executive director of the oldest national organization advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality and justice, I write today to urge you to support and co-sponsor the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) (S. 1088/H.R. 1652) and the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) (S. 403/H.R. 1199).

SNDA would establish a comprehensive federal prohibition against discrimination and harassment based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity in public elementary and secondary schools across the country. The Act would provide LGBT students with long overdue and much needed explicit federal protections against discrimination and harassment. The legislation also protects students who associate with LGBT people, including students with LGBT parents and friends.

According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey, 63.5% of students felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, and 43.9% because of their gender expression. Additionally, 60.4% of students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most often believing little to no action would be taken or the situation could become worse if reported. Furthermore, students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation were three times more likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (57.9% vs. 19.6%).

SSIA would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to require school districts in states that receive ESEA funds to adopt codes of conduct to specifically prohibit bullying and harassment, including on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion. Additionally, SSIA would require that states report data on bullying and harassment to the Department of Education. The Department of Education would then be obligated to provide Congress with a report on the state reported data.

Most importantly, as shown by the recent rash of suicides of bullied children across the nation, these bills are part of a comprehensive preventative strategy to ensure that youth survive the years they spend in school. No parent should ever again have to learn that their child has taken his or her life due to bullying and harassment from a peer that was entirely **preventable**.

SNDA and SSIA will assist in creating a welcoming environment for all students and ensure that children are able to focus on education, rather than merely survival. Once enacted, these protections will help create a better educated, more productive population, able to contribute fully to the general welfare of our nation. Again, we urge you to support SNDA (S. 1088/ H.R. 1652) and SSIA (S. 403/H.R. 1199) as a co-sponsor of this essential legislation.

Sincerely,

Rea Carey  
Executive Director