



March 24, 2014

United States Congress
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the two million children being raised by parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, (LGBT), I urge you to co-sponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (S. 403 and H.R. 1199) and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (S. 1088 and H.R. 1652). Family Equality Council is a national organization working to ensure full social and legal equality for LGBTQ parents and their children by providing direct support, educating the American public, and securing inclusion in legislation, policies, and practices impacting families. Central to our mission is ensuring that children with LGBTQ parents are able to attend school without fear of bullying, violence, harassment and discrimination because of who their parents are or how their families were created.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) would amend the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (Title IV, Part A, Subpart 1 of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), which supports programs that prevent violence and drug use in and around schools in order to foster a safe learning environment that supports student academic achievement. The bill would require schools and districts receiving federal funds to adopt codes of conduct that specifically ban bullying and harassment of all children, including on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. The bill also prohibits bullying of students who associate with individuals with these characteristics, providing protection for the children of LGBT parents.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) is modeled after Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. §§ 1681-1688), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and provides legal recourse to redress such discrimination. SNDA prohibits any school program or activity receiving federal financial assistance from discriminating against any public school student on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition, SNDA prevents discrimination against any public school student because of the actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of a person with whom a student associates or has associated.

America has a rich tradition of valuing education and protecting and nurturing children through the educational process. Children with LGBT parents should not grow up feeling that their country does not value their success or the legitimacy of their parents and their families. We must ensure that all children have the same opportunity to thrive – which requires that they feel safe, supported and valued in school. Students experiencing harassment based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or because they have LGBT parents are deprived of equal educational opportunities and are too often left with few or no avenues for recourse.

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Bullying and harassment in schools is a nationwide problem, as is evidenced by recent cases over the past several years where students across the country took their own lives after enduring relentless bullying and harassment at school. Studies show that alarming numbers of children with LGBT parents report experiencing bullying and harassment at school because of who their parents are and how their families were formed. Family Equality Council has issued a report which found that 42% of the children surveyed reported experiencing verbal harassment in the previous twelve months at school because of their family composition, including negative remarks specifically about having an LGBT parent. More than 1/3 of these same students reported that they had been verbally harassed because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and nearly 1/3 had experienced verbal harassment because of the way they expressed their gender. Research shows that unchecked bullying and harassment negatively impact student achievement by decreasing interest in school, increasing absenteeism, and decreasing concentration levels for students. Leaders in the fields of education and child welfare agree that positive school climate and culture is a critical condition for promoting students' academic success.

Currently, federal law expressly addresses discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, disability and national origin, but does not explicitly include sexual orientation or gender identity protections. Nor does federal law comprehensively and expressly address issues of school bullying, harassment and discrimination, leaving LGBT students and children who have LGBT parents with limited legal recourse against such activity. Amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to include the principles outlined in SSIA presents an opportunity for the federal government to fill critical gaps in education policy and promote and support equal opportunity for all students. We must address this fundamental problem and create safer, healthier school climates for our children.

All students, regardless of their personal characteristics, who their parents are, or how their families were created deserve to attend schools conducive to learning and achievement. It is Family Equality Council's belief that Congress and the Administration must include the principles of SSIA in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to ensure all students are respected and have the opportunity to succeed. Establishing and maintaining a federal commitment to integrating the provisions of the Safe Schools Improvement Act into the Elementary and Secondary Education Act can help achieve that goal.

I very much appreciate your leadership and look forward to answering any questions you or your staff may have about this important issue. Please contact Michael Porcello (mporcello@familyequality.org, 202-496-1285) in our Washington, D.C. office with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gabriel Blau", written over a light yellow rectangular background.

Gabriel Blau
Executive Director
Family Equality Council

Founders
James Lecezne
Peggy Rajski
Randy Stone (1958-2007)

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Abbe Land
Executive Director & CEO

1875 Eye Street NW, 11th Floor
Washington, DC 20006
202-204-4730
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March 25, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

In honor of next month's Day of Silence highlighting anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment in schools,¹ and on behalf of the more than one hundred thousand lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth served annually by The Trevor Project's life-saving programming, we write in strong support of the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA, H.R. 1199 & S. 403). We thank the 226 bipartisan House and Senate cosponsors of this critical bill for addressing what has become a pervasive national problem,² and we urge all members of Congress to join them.

The Trevor Project is the leading nonprofit, national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ young people through age 24. The Trevor Project saves young lives through its accredited free and confidential lifeline, secure instant messaging services which provide live help and intervention, a social networking community for LGBTQ youth, in-school workshops, educational materials, online resources, and advocacy. The Trevor Project is a leader and innovator in suicide prevention.

Studies show that approximately 20% to 30% of U.S. students in grades 6 through 12 are bullied at school.³ Nearly one in four public schools report that bullying occurs among students on a daily or weekly basis.⁴ LGBTQ youth are especially vulnerable. According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey,⁵ 81.9% of LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, and 63.9% of LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed because of their gender expression. A third of LGBTQ students have skipped a class or an entire day of school at least once in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. LGBT youth that are subject to high rates of bullying and harassment face increased rates of depression, lower self-esteem, and lower school connectedness.

Bullying and harassment may significantly and negatively impact young people's mental health—which can increase the risk for suicide. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24. LGB youth are 4 times more likely, and questioning youth are 3 times more likely, to attempt suicide as their straight peers.⁶ Nearly half of young transgender people have seriously thought about taking their lives, and one quarter report having made a suicide attempt.⁷

The Safe Schools Improvement Act will ensure that school districts throughout the country create anti-bullying policies tailored to meet the needs of their communities, and it provides educators with the prevention and educational tools they need to protect youth from bullying and harassment. These simple steps can help to make a real difference in the lives of young people nationwide.

Please cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (S. 403/H.R. 1199) today. Together we can make schools safer for all young people through education and awareness.

We urge you to contact Representative Linda Sánchez (5-6676) and Senator Robert Casey (4-6324) to cosponsor SSIA. Thank you again to the members of Congress who have already registered their support.

Ultimately, this is about ensuring schools are safe so that all students receive the quality education they deserve.

Sincerely,



Abbe Land
Executive Director & CEO
The Trevor Project

¹ DAY OF SILENCE, <http://www.dayofsilence.org/> (last visited Mar. 19, 2014).

² On December 8, 2010, USA Network published its 2nd annual “United or Divided” poll. 58% of respondents gave America a C or D grade for its efforts to stop bullying by kids. 89% believed it was a serious problem, and nearly as many (85%) supported congressional action to resolve the problem. 70% were concerned that it was a growing trend. See *USA Network's New 'United or Divided' Poll Shows Americans Believe Racial, Ethnic, Political Divisions are Worse Than Just a Year Ago*, PR NEWSWIRE, Dec. 8, 2010, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/usa-networks-new-united-or-divided-poll-shows-americans-believe-racial-ethnic-political-divisions-are-worse-than-just-a-year-ago-111547664.html> (last visited Mar. 19, 2014).

³ Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States 2011*, MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY WEEKLY REPORT, June 8, 2012, at 161; Nat’l Ctr. for Educ. Statistics., *Student Victimization in U.S. Schools*, Nov. 2011, at 11.

⁴ *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012 - Indicator 7: Discipline Problems Reported by Schools*, NAT’L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS., http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/crimeindicators2012/ind_07.asp (last visited Mar. 19, 2014)

⁵ See generally Joseph G. Kosciw, et al., *2011 National School Climate Survey*, GAY, LESBIAN & STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK, Sept. 2012.

⁶ Kann, L, et al. 2011. “Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health-risk behaviors among students in grades 9-12 – Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, selected sites, United States, 2001-2009.” MMWR 60(SS07): 1-133. Available from <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6007a1.htm>

⁷ Arnold H. Grossman & Anthony R. D’Augelli, *Transgender Youth and Life-Threatening Behaviors*, 37(5) SUICIDE LIFE THREAT BEHAV. 527 (2007).



March 26, 2014

Re: Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 1199)

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), I urge you to support and co-sponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act ("SSIA", H.R. 1199).

No student, irrespective of their race, religion, gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, should be denied access to an education and the opportunity for success because their schools are unable to be a safe space for all. By requiring districts to establish procedures to address bullying and collect data on incidents, schools will be accountable to teachers, parents, and students. The increased data collection will clarify the problem, and the requirement to establish procedures will help school districts adopt more effective strategies that will allow students an equal opportunity to succeed.

We urge you to support SSIA in response to increasing reports of harassment and violence faced by Sikh American students in schools. Consider the experience of Akashdeep Singh Ahluwalia, an eleven year-old Sikh American from New Jersey. Like many Sikh American students, who keep their articles of faith, he was bullied. Akashdeep was bullied so often that he had to change schools. When asked how he feels about the harassment he continues to face he responded, "It really depresses me. But in the end what can I do?"¹

No student should ask "what can I do?" when they are bullied. No student should feel alone because they are bullied. Your support of SSIA will help schools create an environment in which Sikh American and other students are given an opportunity to build a community with their classmates and succeed.

SALDEF urges you to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act. Should you have any questions about the Act and its impact on the Sikh American community, please contact Navdeep Singh, Policy Director, at navdeep@saldef.org or 202-393-2700x128.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jasjit Singh". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Jasjit Singh
Executive Director

¹ BBC World Service, "Heart and Soul: A Place to Dwell". December 28, 2013. *Available at* http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p01ndgxq/Heart_and_Soul_A_Place_to_Dwell/



March 26, 2014

Re: Safe Schools Improvement Act (S. 403)

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), I urge you to support and co-sponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act ("SSIA", S. 403).

No student, irrespective of their race, religion, gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, should be denied access to an education and the opportunity for success because their schools are unable to be a safe space for all. By requiring districts to establish procedures to address bullying and collect data on incidents, schools will be accountable to teachers, parents, and students. The increased data collection will clarify the problem, and the requirement to establish procedures will help school districts adopt more effective strategies that will allow students an equal opportunity to succeed.

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Sincerely,

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Jasjit Singh
Executive Director

¹ BBC World Service, "Heart and Soul: A Place to Dwell". December 28, 2013. *Available at* http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p01ndgxq/Heart_and_Soul_A_Place_to_Dwell/



Cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act

March 27, 2014

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (S. 403), a bipartisan bill which ensures that states and school districts develop comprehensive, enumerated anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies that cover all students, including students who do not conform to gender stereotype.

AAUW's research on bullying and sexual harassment, *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School* found, based on a nationally representative survey, found that 48 percent of students surveyed had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the 2010-11 school year. Of those, 87 percent said the harassment had a negative emotional and/or physical effect on them. Students experienced verbal, physical, and cyber (Facebook, text, email, or another electronic form) harassment. Despite the prevalence of harassment, only 9 percent of students who experienced harassment reported the incident to a teacher, guidance counselor, or other adult at their school. Only one quarter of harassed students talked about their experience with a family member. AAUW encourages you to read the report, which can be accessed at www.aauw.org/learn/research/crossingtheline.cfm.

AAUW's report underscores the urgency of Sen. Robert Casey's Safe Schools Improvement Act (S. 403). In addition to requiring policies prohibiting bullying and harassment, effective complaint procedures, and information sharing in current reporting systems, SSIA also provides opportunities for professional development to prevent bullying and harassment and student education programs. This is a critically important bill that will make a real difference in the lives of ALL students nationwide. That is why this bill is supported by over 110 leading national organizations in the fields of education, health, youth development, civil rights and religion.

AAUW strongly encourages you to cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (S. 403) by contacting Christina Baumgardner (christina_baumgardner@casey.senate.gov) with Senator Casey (D-PA). Cosponsorship and votes associated with this issue may be scored in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record* for the 113th Congress. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Erin Prangle, associate director of government relations, at 202/785-7730, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Maatz
Vice President of Government Relations



PFLAG National Seeks Support for and Action on Key Youth Bills

March 28, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

I write on behalf of PFLAG members in your District, from whom you will hear directly between today and April 11 to express both thanks if you have already demonstrated your support for, and a request if you have not supported all students, including LGBT and gender non-conforming youth, to be safe in their schools, including the journey from their home, if they have one, and back.

Specifically, today's letter to you involves three bills: **The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA)**, **The Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA)** and **Every Child Deserves a Family (ECDF)**.

PFLAG is the nation's largest family and ally organization. It is comprised of parents, families, friends and straight allies united with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), and has more than 350 chapters and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities and town and rural areas in all 50 states.

PFLAG's values are America's values. We believe that the welfare, safety and well-being of our children, all of our children, is an American value with a high priority that merits your attention.

As noted, you will receive a call for urgent action directly from your constituents who are PFLAG members and supporters. For now, I hope you can bear these in mind as you hear from people back home:

Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) and Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA). As Congress moves toward agreeing upon the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the 113th Congress, these two bills--either by inclusion with exact language or by expressed intent with similar language--are desired to be included. Please move both of these bills forward for the sake of safety without bullying or harassment of our student youth as they wish merely to learn as peer students do now.

Every Child Deserves a Family (ECDF). This child welfare non-discrimination bill warrants broader attention in both chambers of Congress. We think it is very important to make legally possible the linking of children with parents for adoption and guardians for fostering, including LGBT children and potential LGBT parents. There are so many children ready to be adopted or fostered, including LGBT youth. Please help them.

Sincerely,

Diego Sanchez, APR, Director of Policy

PFLAG National - dsanchez@pflag.org or direct: 202.657.6997, cell: 617.835.1455 www.pflag.org