

31 March 2014

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers and all of the nearly 2 million people across the country that we represent, we urge you to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA, H.R. 1199 & S. 403) and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA, H.R. 1652 & S. 1088). We thank the sponsors and cosponsors of these two bills for recognizing the importance of providing all students a safe and productive learning environment, and we implore all members of congress to join them.

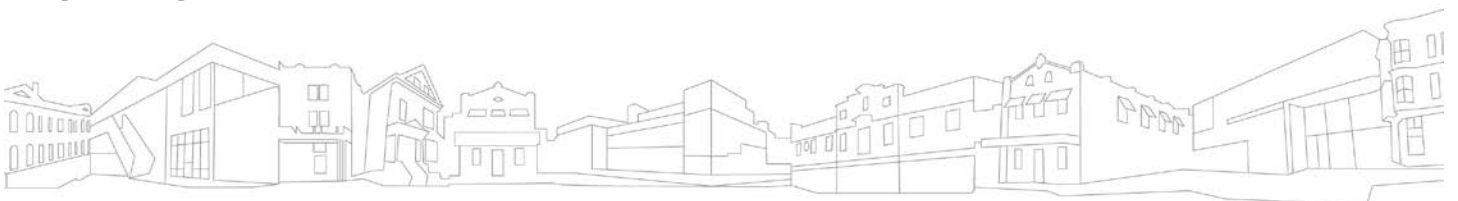
CenterLink represents 149 centers in 45 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, supporting the heart and soul of the LGBT movement. LGBT community centers work more closely with their LGBT constituency and engage more community leaders and decision-makers than any other LGBT network in the country. It is these community centers that often serve as the first line of defense against harassment and bullying of LGBT youth, and it these centers that see the devastating impact of these acts on our country's students.

According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey¹, over 80% of LGBT students reported being harassed in school because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, with almost 1 out of every 5 LGBT students reporting that they had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and over 1 out of 10 students reporting that they had been physically assaulted because of their gender identity. Altogether, 63.5% of LGBT students surveyed expressed that they felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 43.9% felt unsafe because of their gender identity. Students who feel unsafe may choose to avoid school entirely, creating the potential for illiteracy, joblessness, and homelessness among LGBT youth. Bullying is more than an issue of name calling and spitballs. For many students, it is a matter of life and death.

The SSIA is a proposed amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that focuses on using local educational agencies to create policies that ensure harassment doesn't impede education. The SSIA would add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of enumerated categories of students which bullying and harassment are likely to target. The bill would also require schools to collect data on incidences and responses, and to inform the public of their findings on an annual basis, ensuring accountability for their actions.

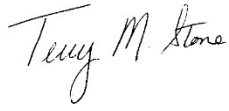
The SNDA protects students from school-based discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, comparable to what Title IX is designed to address for sex and gender. It both forbids schools from discriminating based on sexual orientation and prohibits schools from ignoring harassing behavior. It also provides students with the means to report violations of these prohibitions in court.

¹ 2011 National School Climate Survey. Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network. 2012. <http://glsen.org/nscc>



It is our responsibility to ensure that all students have access to quality education without fear of harassment and discrimination. We strongly encourage you to support and co-sponsor the SSIA and the SNDA.

Sincerely,



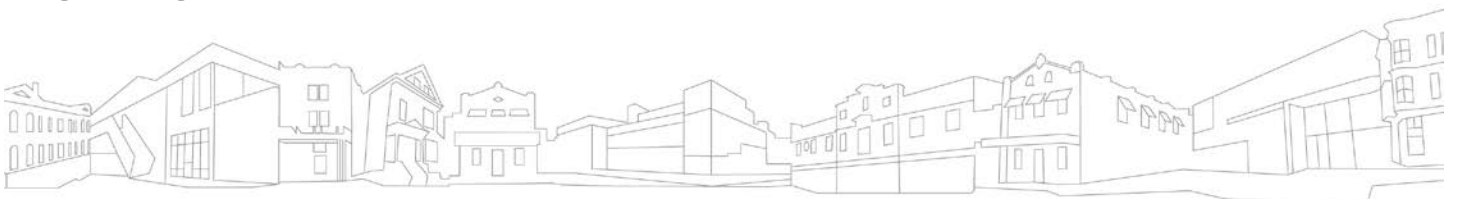
Terry Stone

CEO

CenterLink is a 501(c) 3 organization.

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BOSTON | DENVER | SAN FRANCISCO

working for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jews in Jewish life

April 1st, 2014

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Keshet, a national organization working for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jews in Jewish life, I urge you to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA), H.R. 1199, and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA), H.R. 1652.

Bullying and harassment of LGBT students, as well as students perceived to be LGBT, is widespread. According to research done by GLSEN, Inc., the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, over 80% of LGBT students have felt harassed due to their sexual orientation. Such bullying and harassment can—and *has*—led to dangerous situations for youth.

Keshet is pleased to have spearheaded the Jewish community to stand against bullying of all forms. Since 2010, we have asked Jewish organizations and individuals to take a community pledge. Signatories have put their name to the following statement:

As members of a tradition that sees each person as created in the divine image, we respond with anguish and outrage at the spate of suicides brought on by homophobic bullying and intolerance.

We hereby commit to ending homophobic bullying or harassment of any kind in our synagogues, schools, organizations, and communities.

I pledge to speak out when I witness anyone being demeaned for their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

I commit myself to do whatever I can to ensure that each and every person in my community is treated with dignity and respect.

Since the campaign launched, more than 11,000 individuals and 1,000 Jewish organizations have signed on, making a public commitment to stand up against demeaning or bullying treatment of anyone due to real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. We ask for members of our government to make their own commitment to protecting students from bullying within schools by taking action in Congress.

There is a Jewish concept known as **תּוֹקֵיַת מִלּוֹע**, or *Tikkun Olam*, which translates to an obligation to repair and heal the world. While term might be rooted in Jewish text and tradition, the concept is universal. Please stand with the Jewish community and Keshet and help repair the world by protecting our students.



BOSTON | DENVER | SAN FRANCISCO

working for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jews in Jewish life

For more information, please contact Keshet at [617.524.9227](tel:617.524.9227).

Idit Klein, Keshet Executive Director



BOSTON | DENVER | SAN FRANCISCO

working for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jews in Jewish life

April 1st, 2014

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Keshet, a national organization working for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jews in Jewish life, I urge you to take action and co-sponsor the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA), S.1088, and the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA), S.403.

Bullying and harassment of LGBT students, as well as students perceived to be LGBT, is widespread. According to research done by GLSEN, Inc., the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, over 80% of LGBT students have felt harassed due to their sexual orientation. Such bullying and harassment can—and *has*—led to dangerous situations for youth.

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Idit Klein, Keshet Executive Director

April 1, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, which works to fulfill my father's vision for a just and peaceful world, and our bullying prevention initiative, RFK Project SEATBELT, I strongly urge you to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 1199 & S.403).

Bullying is, at its core, a human rights violation. It is the abuse of the powerless at the hands of the powerful, and it is a threat against the right to receive an education free from persecution. According to the U.S. Department of Education, over 28% of youth age 12-18 report being bullied in the past year. The effects of bullying are serious and long-lasting and affect both academic achievement as well as mental and physical health long after the bullying has stopped.

SSIA provides a consistent definition of bullying, solidifies the requirement for schools to address bullying, and holds them accountable to collect data on the incidence and response. Although bullying prevention laws now exist in forty-nine states, D.C., and Puerto Rico, these laws vary dramatically. A 2011 report by the U.S. Department of Education showed that only a handful of states follow best practices shown to be effective in reducing bullying such as enumerating groups frequently targeted for bullying, including relationally or socially aggressive acts like social ostracism, and providing for mental health support for not only those targeted by bullying, but also those who perpetrate. SSIA ensures that all states follow these best practices.

In 1973, child abuse legislation was at the same point we are today with bullying prevention legislation. Nearly all states had some form of child abuse law, yet each defined child abuse differently and provided different reporting and assistance procedures and regulations. Each state recognized the need for such legislation, just like nearly all states have with bullying today, yet these differences made it hard for the federal government to provide assistance to serve the needs of each state. With varying definitions, collecting accurate data to understand the issue was also impossible. With a clear need for a federal definition and federal guidance on the minimum requirements surrounding child abuse, the first Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was enacted in 1974.

CAPTA has made it possible for more consistent and accurate accounting of child abuse and more sustained, collaborative and evidence-based efforts towards its prevention. It is time we do the same for bullying. SSIA capitalizes on the existing momentum in states and ensure we are working efficiently towards the same goal. I urge you to support passage of the Safe Schools Improvement Act and ensure youths' rights to an education are not violated by bullying. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



Kerry Kennedy, President
Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights



empowering youth to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools

April 2, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network, we write today to urge you to support two critically important bills: The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) (H.R. 1199 / S. 403) and Student Non-Discrimination Act (H.R. 1652 / S. 555). GSA Network is a national organization that operates a national association of 39 statewide organizations serving Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in more than 3,000 schools across the country. Tens of thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and straight ally youth participate in GSA clubs each year, and work to make schools safer.

Together these bills represent the first Federal definition of bullying and harassment, a necessary step to helping school districts, administrators and educators prevent, identify and address incidents of bullying and harassment. In the United States, 63.5% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and 43.9% because of how they express their gender. 81.9% of LGBT students were verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation and 63.9% because of their gender expression. 55.2% of LGBT students were harassed or threatened by their peers via electronic mediums, often referred to as cyber bullying.

In addition to defining bullying and harassment, the SSIA and SNDA recognize that bullying and harassment on the bases of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity as discriminatory; provide remedies and incentives for schools to prevent and remedy bullying and harassment including implementation of restorative practices, and add to existing classes protected from discrimination individuals who are targets of bullying and harassment based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

The high incidence of harassment and bullying is exacerbated by school personnel who rarely, if ever, intervene. In the United States, 60.4% of LGBT students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most often due to believing that little to no action would be taken or the situation would worsen if reported. Of those who reported incidents, 36.7% said school staff did nothing in response.

www.gsanetwork.org

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empowering youth to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools

GSA Network strongly supports the use of evidence-based restorative practices that facilitate students' social-emotional learning and create more positive and safe environments for all students. Restorative practices create opportunities for growth and learning for both the targets *and* perpetrators of bullying and harassment who themselves are often acting out through bullying behavior to protect against their own potential harassment by others. When school discipline focuses on punitive approaches, those social-emotional learning opportunities are lost.

Recently, the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights and the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division together issued guidance to school districts to address and remedy the disproportionate administration and severity of punitive school discipline practices on the basis of race. While this guidance does not describe the impact of punitive school discipline practices impact LGBTQ students of color specifically, we know that LGBTQ students in general, and LGBTQ students of color *in particular*, face disproportionate administration and severity of punitive discipline practices. In 2010, the Journal of Pediatrics released findings that LGB youth are 1.4 times more likely to be suspended than their straight peers and up to three times more likely to experience criminal justice and school sanctions than their straight peers. In 2012, the Center for American Progress reported that LGBTQ youth are significantly over-represented in the juvenile justice system (often the result of removal from school): approximately 300,000 gay and transgender youth are arrested and/or detained each year, of which more than 60 percent are black or Latino.

GSA Network appreciates your leadership in addressing this important issue, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that it becomes law. If you have any questions, please email me at Carolyn@gsanetwork.org or 415-552-4229.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carolyn Laub".

Carolyn Laub
Executive Director

www.gsanetwork.org

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April 2, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the nation's middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) urges you to cosponsor the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) (H.R. 1652/S.1088) and the Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 1199/S.403) and to support their inclusion in a comprehensive bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

NASSP believes that learning occurs best in a supportive, inviting, orderly, and personalized school setting, where students are safe and feel free from theft, threats, intimidation, bullying, weapons, drugs, or violence of any type. Principals accept that their first responsibility is to foster such a climate, and the public continues to confirm that priority. NASSP believes that school leaders and staff members, along with community members and leaders, have a shared responsibility to ensure that schools are safe and orderly. Trusting relationships in school are the most effective means of ensuring school safety.

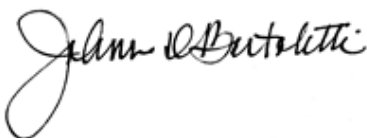
As you know, students who are (or are perceived to be) LGBT are subjected to pervasive discrimination, including harassment and bullying. The harassment youth experience in school deprives them of equal educational opportunities by increasing their likelihood of skipping school, underperforming academically, and dropping out. Left unchecked, this harassment can contribute to even more devastating consequences, including suicide. Furthermore, while discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, disability, national origin and religion are expressly addressed in federal civil rights laws or the Constitution, they do not explicitly cover sexual orientation or gender identity. As a result, parents of LGBT students have limited legal recourse when schools fail to protect their children from discrimination.

The SNDA prohibits public schools from discriminating against any student on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. It allows an aggrieved individual to assert a violation of these prohibitions in a judicial proceeding. In addition, it allows federal authorities to address discrimination made unlawful by the bill. The 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.

The 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 specifically prohibiting bullying and harassment, including on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion. The bill would also require schools to collect data on incidences and responses, and require the Department of Education to report these findings to Congress every two years, ensuring that schools are held accountable for their actions.

These two bills will help to ensure all students experience safe and intellectually stimulating environments fostered by school districts, schools, school leaders and educators. We urge you to support and cosponsor both the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) (H.R. 1652/S.1088) and Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 1199/S.403) so that each student learns in a supportive, inviting, orderly, and personalized school environment.

Sincerely,



JoAnn Bartoletti
Executive Director
NASSP



April 3, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

We continue to be amazed at missed opportunities to give critical attention to and address what has become a pervasive national problem. On behalf of the hundreds of progressive faith leaders across the country who are members of African American Ministers in Action (AAMIA), we write urging you to be part of the solution by supporting and cosponsoring the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) (H.R. 1199 & S. 403) and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) (H.R. 1652 and S. 1088), and we thank you if you are already on board.

AAMIA is a body of clerics who also are concerned parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, sisters and brothers, caregivers of school age children and youth. Since 2010, with the increase in media attention paid to bullying-related suicides, we have joined with other faith, civil, and human rights groups to stand on behalf and for protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students as well as those 20.1% who, according to the CDC 2011 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, “are perceived as different from their peers” and therefore “at risk of being bullied”. Why? Because it’s the right thing to do!

In 2011 over 20% of high school youth were bullied and the National School Climate Center Survey reported “over 50% of students do not feel safe in school.” As you know bullying can be verbal, social and physical. According to a survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN): 81.9% of LGBT students suffered verbal harassment; 38.3% were subject to physical harassment; and 18.8% experienced physical assault based on sexual orientation. While some have noted gender identity as “a new territory” for school boards, as well as for some faith leaders, 13 states and Washington, DC have laws prohibiting discrimination in schools based on gender identity and expression.

Your support of SSIA and SNDA would provide an important confirmation that we are on the right track to end student misconduct. A 2010 “Dear Colleague” letter from the Assistant Secretary of the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Education noted that this type of behavior results in “*a climate of fear and disrespect that can seriously impair the physical and psychological health of its victims and create conditions that negatively affect learning, thereby undermining the ability of students to achieve their full potential.*”

A student who does not feel safe due to bullying and harassment may choose avoidance and social isolation that will only add to their loss of learning and increase the harm they are already enduring. This is problematic. According to the GLSEN survey, 29.8% of LGBT students skipped class at least once and 31.8% missed at least one entire day of school in the past month alone because of safety concerns. Even when they remain in class, targeted students lose as much as half a grade point. This has to change, and we can be part of that change.

Your partnership is needed to continue the necessary work to reverse this trend of disrespect, harassment, and victimization. SSIA and SNDA really are matters of life, the quality of life, and death. SSIA supports the creation of comprehensive anti-bullying policies that enumerate specific categories of targeted students – including those targeted based on sexual orientation and gender identity – as well as data collection, public education, and grievance procedures. SNDA protects all students but especially those who are subject to school-based sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination, much like Title IX does for gender discrimination and much like other areas of law do for various protected classes. Furthermore, it recognizes bullying and harassment as discrimination, and it provides both for remedies against discrimination and incentives for schools to prevent it from happening in the first place.

As clergy we will continue to learn and grow in our work for civil and human rights for all because of critical needs that have risen with the increase of cyberbullying and being bullied on school property. When young people come to our places of worship, they walk into a sanctuary, a safe place. This is what we should cooperatively be striving for in our schools.

We encourage you to be a partner in stopping abhorrent behavior that prevents victimized students from accessing quality education. All children deserve far better than that. Can we count on your support and cosponsorship? Your consideration of SSIA and SNDA, including as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), is necessary and appreciated.

Please contact Representative Linda Sánchez (5-6676) and Senator Robert Casey (4-6324) to cosponsor SSIA and Representative Jared Polis (5-2161) and Senator Al Franken (4-5641) to cosponsor SNDA.

We thank you if you have already joined our cause.

Sincerely,



Reverend Timothy McDonald, III
Chairman



Reverend Dr. Robert P. Shine
Vice-Chair



Minister Leslie Watson Malachi
Director



1090 Vermont Avenue, NW | Suite 850
Washington, DC 20005

April 3, 2014

Dear Representative:

For too long a national inattention to bullying has left America's LGBT youth particularly exposed to extremely high rates of harassment and assault. According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey, over 81.9% of LGBT students experienced verbal harassment, over four in ten were physically harassed, and over one in five suffered physical assault based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many in Congress recognize the reality that faces our nation's youth and the positive impact of anti-bullying laws, which is why they have taken steps to prevent bullying in our nation's schools. By becoming the next co-sponsor of the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA), you, too, can help American children.

SSIA is a zero-cost bill that would impart anti-bullying eligibility requirements for states that receive federal education grants—helping to reduce bullying and save lives. Safe school laws are effective. Multiple studies show that students who live in states with LGBT-inclusive safe school laws experience less harassment and bullying and fewer suicide attempts than students who live in states without these protections. Currently, there is no federal anti-bullying law, and though some states have enacted their own, these laws vary greatly by state and often exclude protections from bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identity—leaving too many children unprotected.

We can all agree that the physical safety and emotional well-being of our nation's schoolchildren should not be dependent on the state in which they live, which is why we urge Congress to stand up for America's schoolchildren and pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act.

H.R. 1199 and S. 403 each has strong bipartisan support, including co-sponsorship from Senators Mark Kirk and Lisa Murkowski, as well as Representatives Richard Hanna, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Don Young, Christopher Gibson, Michael Grimm, Jon Runyan, Charles Dent, Frank LoBiondo and Peter King. These legislators realize that SSIA is a necessary and non-controversial piece of legislation that will go a long way toward protecting students and reducing bullying in our schools, ultimately resulting in an educational environment in which all students can thrive.

Log Cabin Republicans kindly ask you to stand up for America's schoolchildren and take a stand against bullying by co-sponsoring the Safe Schools Improvement Act.

Thank you in advance for your support of this common-sense legislation, and if you have any further questions about the Safe Schools Improvement Act, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Gregory T. Angelo
Executive Director
Log Cabin Republicans



1090 Vermont Avenue, NW | Suite 850
Washington, DC 20005

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Sincerely,

Gregory T. Angelo
Executive Director
Log Cabin Republicans

April 4, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of Transgender Law Center, the nation's largest transgender civil rights organization, I urge you to co-sponsor the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA), H.R. 1652 and S. 1088, and to support its inclusion in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) or perceived to be LGBT are subject to well-documented, pervasive discrimination, including harassment, bullying, intimidation and violence. These students are deprived of a fair chance at receiving educational opportunities in our schools.

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey, *Injustice at Every Turn*, found that 78% of transgender people reported being harassed in school. A staggering 31% of transgender people reported being harassed by teachers, and reported a multitude of devastating effects of having an unsupportive school environment.

Federal statutory protections address discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex and disability. Unfortunately, federal civil rights laws do not expressly protect students from discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Decades of civil rights history show that civil rights laws are effective in decreasing discrimination against specific vulnerable groups.

It is time that we extend these laws to protect our LGBT youth.

The SNDA prohibits public schools from discriminating against any student on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. It allows an aggrieved individual to assert a violation of these prohibitions in a judicial proceeding. In addition, it allows federal authorities to address discrimination made unlawful by the bill. The 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.

No administrator, teacher or school staff would be able to be silent when a student is being bullied or harassed because of his or her actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The SNDA makes school districts responsible for preparing staff to deal with bullying and harassment of LGBT youth or those perceived to be LGBT.

We urge you to support and co-sponsor the SNDA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Masen Davis". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Masen Davis
Executive Director