



**National Black Justice Coalition**

Post Office Box 71395

Washington, DC 20024

Office: 202.319.1552

[www.NBJC.org](http://www.NBJC.org)

April 7, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC), the nation's leading civil rights organization dedicated to empowering Black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, I write in strong support of the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA, H.R. 1199 & S. 403) and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA, H.R. 1652 & S. 1088). This month will mark the Seventh Annual National Day of Silence, which is a day of action in which students across the country vow to take a form of silence to call attention to the impact of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in schools. In honor of this important and solemn day, we urge all Members of Congress to support both SSIA and SNDA, and ask for their swift passage.

NBJC believes that every student deserves a learning environment that is safe and free from harassment. No student should be subjected to bullying or harassment that interferes with their ability to learn or jeopardizes their personal safety. According to the most recent National School Climate Survey released in 2011, 81.9 percent of LGBT students suffer verbal harassment, 38.3 percent physical harassment and 18.3 percent physical assault because of their sexual orientation. 63.9 percent suffer verbal harassment, 27.1 percent physical harassment and 12.4 percent physical assault because of their gender expression. This makes students feel defenseless as 63.5 percent reported feeling unsafe based on sexual orientation and 43.9 percent felt so based on gender expression. A student who feels powerless due to bullying and harassment might choose to avoid the situation altogether, adding a loss of learning to the harms they already suffer.

When LGBT students are pushed out of the classroom due to a hostile or unwelcoming school climate, this can lead to negative consequences that go beyond the classroom. As the recent Center for American Progress report entitled *Beyond Bullying* states, LGBT students, specifically LGBT students of color, all too often end up in a cycle of unfair criminalization that has lifelong consequences. According to this report, LGBT youth are up to three times more likely to experience harsh disciplinary treatment by school administrators than their non-LGBT counterparts. LGBT youth also report significant distrust of school administrators and do not believe that school officials do enough to foster safe and welcoming school climates. Most importantly, LGBT youth are disproportionately overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. These disheartening facts serve as further proof for the urgent need of SSIA and SNDA.

Through SSIA and SNDA, and their inclusion in the Strengthening America's Schools Act (S. 1094), Congress has taken the initial steps to reverse the vicious uptick of bullying and hostile school climates towards LGBT students. If enacted, SSIA would support 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. If passed by Congress, SNDA would protect students from school-based sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination similar to the application of Title IX for gender discrimination. SNDA would also recognize bullying and harassment as discrimination, and provide incentives for schools to prevent it from happening in the first place.

We cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the unspeakable tragedies unchecked bullying is causing across our nation. Students must be protected, and must feel safe and affirmed in their schools. NBJC is dedicated to the elimination of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in all our communities, and we recognize how these behaviors specifically attack those that live at the intersection of being Black and LGBT. Ultimately, this is about stopping abhorrent behavior that gets in the way of a quality education. All students deserve far better than that.

Sincerely,



Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks  
Executive Director and CEO



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director and Counsel

Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman, Chair  
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Arthur and Sara Jo Kobacker Building  
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
at Kivie Kaplan Way  
Washington, DC 20036

202.387.2800 Fax: 202.667.9070 E-mail: [rac@urj.org](mailto:rac@urj.org) Visit our website at [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)

April 7, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Washington office of the Union for Reform Judaism whose 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.3 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes 2,000 Reform rabbis, I urge you to support and co-sponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA, H.R. 1199/S. 403) and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA, H.R. 1652/S. 1088), to ensure that all students have safe and supportive learning environments free from harassment and discrimination.

The Reform Jewish Movement has long been active in the struggle for civil rights for all Americans, including members of the LGBT community. As people of faith, our holy texts teach us that all people are created in the Divine image, *b'tselem Elohim* (Gen. 1:27), and should thus be treated with respect and dignity. As Jews, our tradition and history teach us that we should not stand by as others suffer— we envision a government which “to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance” (George Washington, in a letter to Moses Seixas, 1790). Yet LGBT students are frequently victimized in their own schools and at the hands of their fellow students.

According to a 2011 study of more than 8,500 LGBT middle and high school students across the U.S., eight in ten reported experiencing harassment at school because of their sexual orientation and nearly two-thirds because of their gender expression. Moreover, over a third of LGBT students have reported being physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Evidence has shown that harassment and intimidation has a significant impact on the psychological, emotional, and academic welfare of LGBT students.

The Safe School Improvement Act (SSIA) would ensure that school and districts develop and implement comprehensive student conduct policies that include clear prohibitions against bullying and harassment. Furthermore, this legislation would ensure that schools focus on effective prevention strategies to protect students. The Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) would establish a comprehensive federal prohibition against discrimination and harassment of LGBT students in public elementary and secondary schools across the country. SNDA would provide much needed federal protection for LGBT students and their families and friends.

At its root, this issue is about the welfare of children, and the basic right of all Americans to a quality education, free from daily physical violence, intimidation, and persecution. The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA, H.R. 1199/S. 403) and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA, H.R. 1652/S. 1088) are important steps toward this goal. I urge you to support and co-sponsor SSIA and SNDA to make schools a safe place for all students.

Sincerely,

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director



*The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.*





April 8, 2014

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative:

On behalf of National PTA's more than four million members, I write to request your co-sponsorship of the Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 1199), bipartisan legislation that would help to ensure that all children are able to learn in a safe and positive environment free of bullying and harassment.

As the nation's oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy organization, National PTA has long advocated for the health and wellbeing of all children. PTA believes that the safety of children in school settings is a fundamental right and therefore we advocate for policies and programs that address the prevention, intervention, and elimination of bullying to allow every child full access to educational opportunities.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to require K-12 public schools to enact policies to address student-to-student bullying and harassment. Research shows that bullying is a pervasive problem in U.S. schools, as approximately 28 percent of students ages 12-18 report being bullied and 30 percent admit to bullying others.<sup>1</sup> Both bullying other children and being the target of bullies can have lifelong consequences. Students who bully as children often continue abusive behavior into adulthood and in addition to emotional damage, students who experience bullying show decreased academic achievement and are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.<sup>2</sup>

PTA believes that in order for a bullying prevention policy to be effective it must include the training of educators, parents, and students. We are therefore pleased that the SSIA not only requires the development and implementation of an anti-bullying and harassment policy but also that all students, teachers, and parents be educated annually on the policy. PTA also promotes disciplinary interventions that emphasize the positive behavior of students and we therefore strongly support the SSIA's encouragement of positive and preventative approaches to school discipline.

National PTA thanks you for your consideration of this request and looks forward to working with you to ensure that every child is guaranteed a safe learning environment. We urge you to contact Valeria Carranza ([Valeria.Carranza@mail.house.gov](mailto:Valeria.Carranza@mail.house.gov)) in Congresswoman Linda Sánchez's office to



cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 1199). Additionally, if we can be of assistance please contact Jessica Seitz, Education Policy Analyst, at [jseitz@pta.org](mailto:jseitz@pta.org) or (703) 518-1249.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Otha E. Thornton Jr.".

Otha E. Thornton, Jr.  
President  
National PTA

---

<sup>1</sup> Stopbullying.gov. (2013). Facts About Bullying. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Available online at: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/facts/>

<sup>2</sup> Stopbullying.gov. (2013). Effects of Bullying. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Available online at: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/effects/index.html>



April 8, 2014

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of National PTA's more than four million members, I write to request your co-sponsorship of the Safe Schools Improvement Act (S.403), bipartisan legislation that would help to ensure that all children are able to learn in a safe and positive environment free of bullying and harassment.

As the nation's oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy organization, National PTA has long advocated for the health and wellbeing of all children. PTA believes that the safety of children in school settings is a fundamental right and therefore we advocate for policies and programs that address the prevention, intervention, and elimination of bullying to allow every child full access to educational opportunities.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to require K-12 public schools to enact policies to address student-to-student bullying and harassment. Research shows that bullying is a pervasive problem in U.S. schools, as approximately 28 percent of students ages 12-18 report being bullied and 30 percent admit to bullying others.<sup>1</sup> Both bullying other children and being the target of bullies can have lifelong consequences. Students who bully as children often continue abusive behavior into adulthood and in addition to emotional damage, students who experience bullying show decreased academic achievement and are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.<sup>2</sup>

PTA believes that in order for a bullying prevention policy to be effective it must include the training of educators, parents, and students. We are therefore pleased that the SSIA not only requires the development and implementation of an anti-bullying and harassment policy but also that all students, teachers, and parents be educated annually on the policy. PTA also promotes disciplinary interventions that emphasize the positive behavior of students and we therefore strongly support the SSIA's encouragement of positive and preventative approaches to school discipline.

National PTA thanks you for your consideration of this request and looks forward to working with you to ensure that every child is guaranteed a safe learning environment. We urge you to contact Christina Baumgardner ([Christina\\_baumgardner@casey.senate.gov](mailto:Christina_baumgardner@casey.senate.gov)) in Senator Casey's office to



cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (S.403). Additionally, if we can be of assistance please contact Jessica Seitz, Education Policy Analyst, at [jseitz@pta.org](mailto:jseitz@pta.org) or (703) 518-1249.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Otha E. Thornton Jr.".

Otha E. Thornton, Jr.  
President  
National PTA

---

<sup>1</sup> Stopbullying.gov. (2013). Facts About Bullying. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Available online at: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/facts/>

<sup>2</sup> Stopbullying.gov. (2013). Effects of Bullying. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Available online at: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/effects/index.html>



Sexuality Information and Education  
Council of the United States

April 8, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), an organization concerned about the sexual health education and well-being of people of all ages and particularly our nation's youth, I urge you to actively support and cosponsor the *Student Non-Discrimination Act* (SNDA, H.R. 1652/S. 1088) and the *Safe Schools Improvement Act* (SSIA, H.R. 1199/S. 403). Bullying and harassment in schools are pervasive problems with serious consequences for students. SNDA and SSIA are two pieces of legislation that would help create safe and healthy spaces for students to learn.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2011 over 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in the previous year.<sup>1</sup> This problem is even more prevalent for students who identify as or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Eight of ten LGBT students experienced bullying in the form of verbal harassment, while four of ten had been physically harassed at school.<sup>2</sup> Intimidation at school negatively affects LGBT students' attendance, academic performance, educational ambitions, and psychological health. LGBT youth earn grade point averages three-tenths of a point below students who were not harassed, are less likely to pursue postsecondary education, and have higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to their non-LGBT peers.<sup>3</sup>

SNDA would establish a comprehensive federal prohibition against discrimination, including harassment, in public elementary and secondary schools based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. SNDA would provide LGBT students with long overdue and much needed explicit federal protections against discrimination and harassment. It would also protect students with LGBT parents and friends.

SSIA specifically targets bullying and would require all public K-12 schools to enact an anti-bullying policy. This legislation would include specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Further, SSIA would require states to report data on bullying and harassment to the Department of Education and would require the Department of Education to provide Congress with a report on that data every two years.

Federal law currently prohibits bullying and harassment on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, disability, and national origin. Just like all students, LGBT students deserve safe and healthy learning environments where a culture of bullying is unacceptable and students are expected to participate in a culture of acceptance and tolerance.

We strongly encourage you to support the health and well-being of all students by cosponsoring SNDA and SSIA. 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. Thank you to the members of Congress who have already confirmed their support.

If we can provide you or your staff with any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jboyer@siecus.org](mailto:jboyer@siecus.org) or (202) 265-2405.

Sincerely,  
Jesseca Boyer  
Director of Public Policy

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2011*, MMWR Vol. 61:No. 4, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Kosciw, J. G., et al (2012). *The 2011 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*, New York: GLSEN (2012) accessed April 1, 2014, <http://glsen.org/nscls>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of Advocates for Youth, an organization dedicated to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people, we urge you to support two important bills, the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA, HR 1652 & S 1088) and the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA, HR 1199 & S 403). We applaud those who have already demonstrated their support as co-sponsors.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth face tremendous difficulties growing up in communities where heterosexuality is presented as the more acceptable orientation, youth are forced to conform to prevailing ideas about gender identity and expression, and being LGBT is regarded as deviant. Research in the United States suggests that homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism greatly contribute to higher rates of suicide, violence, victimization, risk behavior for HIV infection, and substance abuse among LGBT youth as compared to their heterosexual peers. According to a study by the Gay Lesbian & Straight Education Network of over 8,500 LGBT youth, over 80 percent reported being verbally harassed in the last year because of their sexual orientation and over 10 percent reported being physically assaulted because of their gender expression. Almost one third of LGBT students reported missing at least one day of school in the past month because of safety concerns.

For too long, our LGBT youth have been discriminated against in the classroom. The Student Non-Discrimination Act would prohibit discrimination against students based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as ensure that all students have access to an education in a safe environment free from harassment, bullying, intimidation, or violence. The Safe Schools Improvement Act would establish policies that prevent and prohibit conduct, including bullying and harassment. Together, these two bills would dramatically improve the school climate for LGBT youth and allies to feel safe, supported, and accepted in their school communities.

No young person should feel unsafe in their school because of who they are. Bullying and harassment have no place in our educational system, and SNDA and SSIA help us to protect all young people from being targeted based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. We urge you to support and cosponsor SNDA and SSIA.

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

Sincerely,



Debra Hauser  
President, Advocates for Youth



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

April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of PACER Center, an organization that has been serving parents of children with disabilities since 1978, we write to urge you to support and cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (S. 403/H.R. 1199) and the Student Non-Discrimination Act (S. 1088/H.R. 1652). With your support, we can move toward creating an environment that keeps ALL students, including those with disabilities, not only safe from harmful behavior, but surrounded by an atmosphere of acceptance of differences, kindness toward others, and inclusion.

PACER Center is a Minnesota-based nonprofit formed in 1978 to help parents understand special education laws and to provide support to families. PACER initiated the National Bullying Prevention Center in 2006, after receiving many heartbreaking calls from parents about their children with disabilities being involved in bullying situations. PACER's bullying prevention efforts are noteworthy because they support ALL students—including those without disabilities—along with their families, schools, and the community.

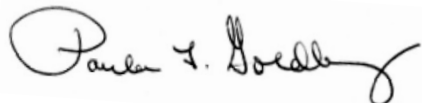
PACER is working to create a paradigm shift in society's views about bullying. Instead of seeing bullying as an accepted behavior and a natural part of childhood, we need to understand that bullying has a significant impact on the lives of children, especially those with disabilities. Children with disabilities are already so often vulnerable and when they are being bullied, their vulnerability magnifies. This can lead to additional challenges to learning in school, including fear of going to school, social isolation, and physical and emotional issues such as depression, anxiety, and lack of self-worth.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act would help ensure that all students in the United States, regardless of demographic, will have access to a safe and supportive school environment within which they can pursue academic achievements to the best of their ability. Bullying substantially interferes with a student's ability to learn, and a federal law against bullying will help protect students from the devastating and long-lasting effects of bullying.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act addresses the particular vulnerability of students who are, or perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to bullying and harassment. Every student has the right to an education free of discrimination. This bill would help protect vulnerable students and make schools safer, more inclusive, and more successful.

We urge you to 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. Thank you to the members of Congress who have already registered their support.

Sincerely,



Paula Goldberg  
Executive Director, PACER Center



April 11, 2014

United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), I am writing to express support for the Safe Schools Improvement Act, sponsored by Rep. Linda Sánchez and the Student Non-Discrimination Act, sponsored by Rep. Jared Polis. For nearly 25 years, GLSEN has worked to create safe and supportive schools for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We firmly believe that passage of these bills is an instrumental component of achieving that goal.

Today is GLSEN's annual Day of Silence. Hundreds of thousands of students across the United States have taken a vow of silence for the day to draw attention to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in schools – behavior that we know has serious consequences. Eight in ten lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, and nearly two-thirds harassed because of their gender expression. Such harassment has detrimental impacts on students' long-term social, academic, psychological and physical well-being, including increased rates of absenteeism and depression and lower grade point averages and educational aspirations.

To most effectively address bullying, harassment and discrimination, it's essential to have effective laws in place. The Safe Schools Improvement Act would empower states to develop anti-bullying laws that best meet their needs, so long as those laws meet basic, fact-based criteria to ensure their effectiveness, including the enumeration of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and religion. The legislation would also streamline data collection on bullying and harassment to help states better address the issue. The Student Non-Discrimination Act would ensure that LGBT students can no longer be discriminated against in public school simply for being who they are.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act has the support of 193 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and 44 bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate. It also has the support of the National Safe Schools Partnership, a coalition of 115 leading national organizations in the fields of education, health, youth development, civil rights, and religion and includes such organizations as Elementary and Secondary School Principals, the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association, and the Boy Scouts of America. The Student Non-Discrimination Act also has strong support in Congress, with 177 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and 39 cosponsors in the Senate, and the support of over 100 leading national organizations.

If you have not yet cosponsored these critically important bills, we hope you will join your colleagues in doing so. If you already have, we send our sincere thanks for your ongoing support. Together, we can make schools safe for all of America's students.

Sincerely,

Eliza Byard, PhD  
Executive Director



April 11, 2014

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), I am writing to express support for the Safe Schools Improvement Act, sponsored by Sen. Bob Casey and the Student Non-Discrimination Act, sponsored by Sen. Al Franken. For nearly 25 years, GLSEN has worked to create safe and supportive schools for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We firmly believe that passage of these bills is an instrumental component of achieving that goal.

Today is GLSEN's annual Day of Silence. Hundreds of thousands of students across the United States have taken a vow of silence for the day to draw attention to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in schools – behavior that we know has serious consequences. Eight in ten lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, and nearly two-thirds harassed because of their gender expression. Such harassment has detrimental impacts on students' long-term social, academic, psychological and physical well-being, including increased rates of absenteeism and depression and lower grade point averages and educational aspirations.

To most effectively address bullying, harassment and discrimination, it's essential to have effective laws in place. The Safe Schools Improvement Act would empower states to develop anti-bullying laws that best meet their needs, so long as those laws meet basic, fact-based criteria to ensure their effectiveness, including the enumeration of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and religion. The legislation would also streamline data collection on bullying and harassment to help states better address the issue. The Student Non-Discrimination Act would ensure that LGBT students can no longer be discriminated against in public school simply for being who they are.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act has the support of 44 bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate and 193 bipartisan cosponsors in the House. It also has the support of the National Safe Schools Partnership, a coalition of 115 leading national organizations in the fields of education, health, youth development, civil rights, and religion and includes such organizations as Elementary and Secondary School Principals, the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association, and the Boy Scouts of America. The Student Non-Discrimination Act also has strong support in Congress, with 39 cosponsors in the Senate and 177 bipartisan cosponsors in the House, and the support of over 100 leading national organizations.

If you have not yet cosponsored these critically important bills, we hope you will join your colleagues in doing so. If you already have, we send our sincere thanks for your ongoing support. Together, we can make schools safe for all of America's students.

Sincerely,

Eliza Byard, PhD  
Executive Director