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MADISONVILLE, Tenn. (WVLT)--The Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights organization, is calling on school leaders in Tennessee's Monroe County to stop subverting the formation of a gay-straight alliance (GSA) at Sequoyah High School in Madisonville.

The school's principal recently allegedly assaulted a straight ally student who was wearing a shirt favoring the GSA, and fair-minded faculty members originally willing to sponsor the group's formation have been intimidated into silence.

"The reports of homophobia in Monroe County, Tennessee, are shocking," said HRC President Joe Solmonese. "Students should feel safe in their schools. For a principal allegedly to assault a student who is defending the rights of his LGBT peers is not only irresponsible and dangerous, but a complete dereliction of his leadership obligations. And faculty members willing to sponsor a GSA should feel free to do so without threat of any kind of retribution from those above them."

The formation and operation of GSAs are protected under the Federal Equal Access Act of 1984.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and ACLU of Tennessee are representing the student involved in the incident with the school's principal.

Law enforcement officials in Madisonville say no charges are likely to be filed in the alleged assault.

Gay-straight alliances in schools play a central role in facilitating safe and welcoming environments for LGBT students.

They also provide opportunities to educate straight allies on the dangers of homophobia and transphobia, and the serious implications harassment and discrimination present to LGBT Americans -- particularly youth.

Earlier this year, Tennessee was in the spotlight for proposed "Don't Say Gay" legislation, which would ban any and all discussion of or materials in Tennessee elementary and middle

schools related to homosexuality.

The ACLU of Tennessee has launched an online action demanding that the school board protect the students' free speech rights.

The Tennessee Equality Project and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network also have created a petition calling on the local sheriff to more thoroughly investigate the alleged assault.

HRC is calling on its members and supporters to act now and tell Monroe County Director of Schools Mike Lowry to halt the intimidation tactics that could be preventing faculty members from supporting the GSA.

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality.

By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all.

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News Article

WVLV-Knoxville, TN

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