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Illinois Safe Schools Coalition: Bullying & the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Jun. 11, 2012 ? Geoffrey

A big kudos from GSA Network to National Association member Illinois Safe Schools Alliance on their groundbreaking work to de-link punitive discipline from bias-based harassment. Building school policy at the intersections of issues that impact LGBTQ and students of color for many years in Illinois, ISSA just narrowly lost a vote on IL House Bill 5290, which would have built on current state law to address not just bullying, but the number of youth of color caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline.

The bill added new categories of students against whom bullying is prohibited and required the State Board of Education to develop a model bullying prevention policy to help districts comply with the current state law requiring all school districts have such a policy and use alternative discipline.

As Shannon Sullivan, Executive Director of Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, wrote in a letter to the editor of the [Chicago Tribune](#): ^[1]

Despite months of negotiating with school boards, teachers and educational stakeholders, House Bill 5290 failed in the Senate by one vote because of an irrelevant anti-gay hysteria.

Our statewide bullying laws already include protections for bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

While it is my profession to end the pervasive anti-gay language in our schools that primarily affects straight kids, the straight kids getting called the "f-a-g" word 28 times a day, every day, are not the biggest losers in the defeat of HB 5290.

Who is? The students of color who are overdisciplined for bullying and other

behaviors until we simply push them out of schools and into prisons. HB 5290 had groundbreaking language defining "restorative measures" as effective alternatives to exclusionary and punitive discipline techniques. In Illinois, 42.5 percent of expulsions are of African-American students, even though they comprise only 19.6 percent of the student population.

The Illinois senators who did not vote or who voted no are all accountable to the students in Illinois who will be given detentions, then suspensions, and eventually be expelled due to the school system's lack of an alternative that HB 5290 would have taken the first step in providing. Our legislators need to know that our kids are paying the price while they are sidetracked by their homosexual panic.

? Shannon Sullivan, executive director, Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, Chicago

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Links

[1] <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/ct-vp-0608voicelettersbriefs-20120608,0,7895473.story>