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Bills, Bills, Bills: Legislating Change in 2013

Apr. 22, 2013 ? yvonna

A new spring means a new slate of queer youth legislative priorities. And last week saw advances for three of the bills we're supporting this year!

First up, on the national level, is the **Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA)**. GSA Network joined 81 other organizations in supporting SNDA [1], a much-needed bill that will give students the federal right to be free from discrimination, harassment and bullying based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. It was introduced last Thursday, but you might [2] already be [3] familiar [4] with it [5]: it's been introduced every year since 2010, when the tragic and high-profile deaths by suicide of several young people brought national attention to the bullying and harassment of LGBT youth.

In California, youth (including Eli Erlick, pictured above with her parents at the capitol) gave powerful testimony to the Assembly Education Committee last Wednesday, persuading them to pass two important bills out of committee. These two bills will help make sure ALL California students can fully participate and succeed in school:

1. **The School Success & Opportunity Act (AB 1266)** will ensure schools understand their responsibility to allow transgender students to fully participate in all school activities, programs, and facilities. In many cases, transgender students are currently prevented from participating in activities, including classes required for graduation, as themselves.
2. **Disruption and Defiance: Reducing Grounds for Harsh Discipline (AB 420)** will limit the use of "willful defiance" as a reason to suspend or expel students. Around 40% of suspensions involve "willful defiance," a vague, subjective category that's been used to punish everything from a gender nonconforming student breaking the dress code to a lesbian student holding her girlfriend's hand. Suspension takes students away from valuable learning time, making it more difficult for youth to succeed in class and stay in school.

Eli, a high school senior from Willets, traveled to Sacramento to make the case for AB 1266:

> No student should have to sacrifice their health, well-being, and the truth about who they are in order to get the credits they need to graduate. When students aren?t allowed to be themselves, they can?t fully engage in school. We need the School Success and Opportunity Act because California schools should be places where all students can succeed.

She'll be back in the state capitol this weekend, joining dozens of other youth activists [6] from across the state for the annual GSA Advocacy & Youth Leadership Academy (GAYLA), a three-day intensive training in the legislative process, policy and administrative advocacy, media activism, and other important leadership skills. GAYLA culminates in Queer Youth Advocacy Day, where students use their new skills to educate and engage lawmakers at the State Capitol in Sacramento. Co-sponsored and organized by GSA Network, Equality California, the ACLU of California, the Transgender Law Center, the Trevor Project, and California NOW, GAYLA and QYAD 2013 will focus on passing AB 1266 and AB 420.

Get ready for some queer youth activism!

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Links

[1] http://www.metroweekly.com/poliglot/2013/04/bill-to-protect-lgbt-students-sees-bipartisan-rein.html
[2] http://gsanetwork.org/news/blog/senator-franken-wants-you-make-it-better/01/19/12
[3] http://gsanetwork.org/news/blog/make-call-make-difference/01/24/12
[4] http://gsanetwork.org/news/will-president-obama-back-passage-antibullying-bill/030912
[5] http://gsanetwork.org/news/spotlight/sen-franken-make-it-better
[6] http://gsanetwork.org/sponsor-an-activist-2013