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LGBTQ Youth Meet Legislators, Rally to Demand Opportunity to Succeed in School

April 29, 2013, Sacramento ? Dozens of high school students are in the state capitol today advocating for two bills to help ensure all youth?including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth?have the opportunity to stay in school and succeed. The youth are gathered for the 8th annual Queer Youth Advocacy Day, which unites LGBT and straight ally youth activists from Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs across state.

"All students should have the opportunity to succeed in school no matter who they are, but that?s not the reality in California,? said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network). ?These brave youth leaders came to Sacramento to demand an end to unreasonable discipline policies and exclusionary school practices that punish LGBT students and push them out of school.?

Students will rally at the State Capitol's north steps at 10:45 a.m. where they will be joined by a number of Senators and Assemblymembers, including Speaker John Pérez (D-Los Angeles), Senator Mark Leno (D-San Francisco), and Assemblymembers Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco), Roger Dickinson (D-Sacramento), Rich Gordon (D-Menlo Park), and Susan Eggman (D-Stockton).

Following the rally, students will visit their representatives' offices to advocate for the School Success and Opportunity Act (AB 1266) and Disruption and Defiance: Reducing Grounds for Harsh Discipline (AB 420). Currently, many LGBT students are excluded from school activities and lose valuable learning time just because of their identity.

?The ACLU of California is thrilled to be a part of this affirmative, potentially life-changing event,? said Hector Villagra, Executive Director of the ACLU of Southern California. ?The ACLU has fought for nine decades for LGBT rights, and specifically seeks to end unlawful bullying and harassment in California schools. We all should want our school communities to promote safety and respect for all.?

AB 1266, authored by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano, would ensure that schools understand

their responsibility to allow transgender students to fully participate in school activities, programs, and facilities in a way that is consistent with their gender identity. Assemblymember Dickinson's AB 420 would limit the use of suspension and expulsion for "willful defiance," a category used in 40% of California suspensions that can mean anything from a lesbian student holding her girlfriend's hand to a gender nonconforming student breaking the school's dress code.

The youth leaders arrived in Sacramento on Friday, April 26, to participate in a three-day educational training, the GSA Advocacy & Youth Leadership Academy (GAYLA). The educational training covered the legislative process, policy advocacy, media activism, and other important leadership skills for students working to change cultural perceptions and treatment of LGBT students in school.

"Equality California is proud to sponsor Queer Youth Advocacy Day, an extraordinary program that engages young people in our democratic process," said John O'Connor, Executive Director of Equality California. "Teaching LGBT youth that they do have a voice and the power to shape policy is so important."

The event is sponsored by Gay-Straight Alliance Network, Transgender Law Center, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of California, Equality California, the Trevor Project, and California NOW.

WEBSITE: www.gsanetwork.org/events/queer-youth-advocacy-day [1]

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Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) is a national youth leadership organization that empowers youth activists to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools by training student leaders and supporting student-led Gay-Straight Alliance clubs throughout the country. In California alone, GSA Network has brought GSA clubs to 61% of public high schools, impacting more than 1.2 million students at 940 schools. GSA Network's youth advocates have played a key role in changing laws and policies that impact youth at the local and state level. GSA Network operates the National Association of GSA Networks, which unites 37 statewide networks of GSA clubs throughout the country. www.gsanetwork.org [2]

ACLU of California comprises the statewide work of the three California affiliates of the American Civil Liberties Union to protect and defend civil liberties.

Equality California (EQCA) is the largest statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender advocacy organization in California. Over the past decade, Equality California has strategically moved California from a state with extremely limited legal protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to a state with some of the most comprehensive protections in the nation. Equality California has partnered with legislators to successfully sponsor more than 85 pieces of pro-equality legislation. EQCA continues to advance equality through legislative advocacy, electoral work, public education and community empowerment. www.EQCA.org [3]

Transgender Law Center works to change law, policy, and attitudes so that all people can live

safely, authentically, and free from discrimination regardless of their gender identity or expression. www.TransgenderLawCenter.org [4]

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning young people under 24. Every day, The Trevor Project saves young lives through its free and confidential lifeline and instant messaging services, in-school workshops, educational materials, online resources and advocacy. Honored by the White House as a "Champion of Change," The Trevor Project is a leader and innovator in suicide prevention. Learn more at www.TheTrevorProject.org [5].

The California chapter of the National Organization for Women is the largest feminist organization in the state, committed to women's and girl's equality and empowerment.

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<http://gsanetwork.org> [6]

Press Release

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[1] <http://gsanetwork.org/events/queer-youth-advocacy-day>

[2] <http://gsanetwork.org/>

[3] <http://www.EQCA.org>

[4] <http://www.TransgenderLawCenter.org>

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