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SACRAMENTO?Today, California Gov. Jerry Brown signed the historic School Success and Opportunity Act into law, ensuring transgender youth have the opportunity to fully participate and succeed in schools across the state. Assembly Bill 1266?which goes into effect on January 1, 2014?was authored by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano and passed the California State Senate and Assembly earlier this summer. The law is the first of its kind in the country, and requires that California public schools respect students? gender identity and makes sure that students can fully participate in all school activities, sports teams, programs, and facilities that match their gender identity.

"I'm so excited that California is making sure transgender students have a fair chance to graduate and succeed," said Calen Valencia, an 18-year-old transgender student from Tulare and Gay-Straight Alliance Network board member. "I should have graduated this year, but my school refused to give me the same opportunity to succeed as other boys. Now other transgender youth won't have to choose between being themselves and graduating high school."

Co-authored by Senators Mark Leno and Ricardo Lara and Assemblymember Toni Atkins, the bill is backed by a coalition of leading organizations, including Transgender Law Center, Gay-Straight Alliance Network, Gender Spectrum, Equality California, ACLU of California, National Center for Lesbian Rights, statewide teacher and parent organizations, and dozens of other organizations.

The new law builds on a national movement to end discriminatory practices and ensure transgender youth have the same opportunity to succeed as other students. Massachusetts and Colorado have statewide policies in line with AB 1266, and the Colorado and Maine state human rights commissions have held that state law requires schools to respect students? gender identity. Additionally, many school districts across the country have adopted policies that ensure no student is left out, including the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation?s second largest school district.

California law already prohibits discrimination in education, but transgender students have been often discriminated against and unfairly excluded from physical education, athletic teams, and other school activities, and facilities. This exclusion negatively impacts students' ability to succeed in school and graduate with their class. For example, physical education credits are required to graduate, but transgender students often do not have the support they need to fully participate in the courses.

The supporting organizations are truly appreciative of Gov. Brown's efforts to protect LGBT Californians and ensure all students have the opportunity to excel in our public education system. From his support to ban harmful sexual orientation change efforts to his leadership on marriage equality to his signing of AB 1266, Gov. Brown has sent a powerful message to LGBT youth letting them know their state and their government fully support them. In so doing, he is not only changing, but also saving lives.

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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 [1]

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 56% of public high schools, impacting more than 1.1 million students at over 900 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]

Gender Spectrum provides resources, training and support to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens. www.genderspectrum.org [3]

The National Center for Lesbian Rights is a national legal organization committed to advancing the human and civil rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community through litigation, public policy advocacy, and public education. www.NCLRights.org [4]

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 [5]

Press Release

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

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Links

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

[2] <http://www.GSANetwork.org>

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

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

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

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