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## Empowered to Make It Better

May. 19, 2011 ? Brandon Serpas

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It's 7 a.m., the hostel is alive with hair dryers and the brushing of teeth, and I feel sick to my stomach. Today we walk over to the Capitol and try to persuade legislators to vote in favor of three bills that would greatly help the LGBTQ communities in our high schools. I have been studying the FAIR Education Act, Seth's Law, and the Gender Nondiscrimination Act nonstop for the last three days, but I still feel frightened. The Senators and Assemblymembers seem to have a regal presence; I worry that, with the slightest nod, they could instantly invalidate our reasons for being there and our attempts to make them see these laws from the perspective of LGBTQ and straight ally youth in California's high schools.

By my second legislative visit, my fears were invalidated. I spoke about Seth's Law, explaining that I didn't know that harassment and bullying complaint procedures existed until I became involved in GSA Network. I would have greatly benefited from Seth's Law when I was in my elementary and junior high school, where I was constantly bullied and harassed without the school doing anything to stop it, and without my knowing that, legally, the school was required to act.

Upon telling my story and advocating for the bills, I didn't get a funny look, glare, or any other type of disapproving facial expression from the elected officials we were visiting. In fact, most of the staff and legislators were very supportive, or at least not apathetic. The elected officials saw, to my amazement, how important these bills are to us.

After Queer Youth Advocacy Day, I realized that I have a voice, and that the people we elect into office have a responsibility to listen to that voice. The experience empowered me to make a difference, and to make it better!

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