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## The White House called & asked how they could Make It Better!

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?White House on line one? isn?t a phrase most high school students would expect to hear. But on the weekend of May 14 and 15, youth leaders from Gay-Straight Alliance Network got together for two [White House Youth Roundtable discussions](#) [1], and spoke directly to government officials about the issues most important to LGBT and allied youth.

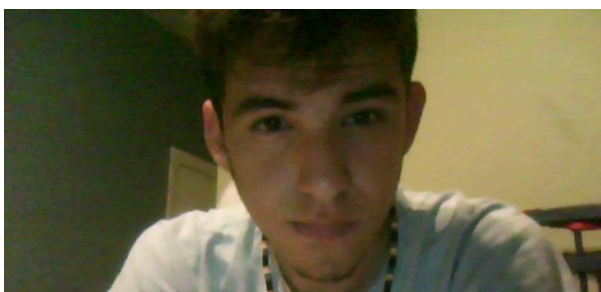
Now Javi Pinedo, a senior at Merrill F. West High School, is headed to Washington, D.C. to continue the conversation. **Do you have advice or ideas for the White House? Issues you think should be addressed?** Check out the problems GSA Network youth identified below and add your thoughts for Javi in the comments!

Talking to Kalpen Modi, Associate Director of the Office of Public Engagement, and Vic Basile of the Office of Personnel Management, the youth shared their stories and problem-solved:

### Top 3 Ways the White House can Make It Better:

1. Pass and implement laws that protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in schools.
2. Educate teachers and school administrators on how and when to intervene in situations of bullying, anti-LGBT and racist slurs as well as how to see the signs of suicide.
3. Make sure schools focus on protecting marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as gender non-conforming and transgender youth.

Here?s what Javi and some of his peers thought about the chance to share their stories with the White House:



?For me, the most important issue is implementing the laws already in place and creating new laws. California law requires schools to notify students about their non-discrimination policy but only 34% of California secondary schools post their policy on their website. California is considered a very progressive state, but even here schools aren't in compliance with the law ? so imagine what students in other states face? For example, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (AB 537) has been in place for over 11 years, but my own school has yet to recognize this law. When I asked my principal?s secretary for a complaint form to fill out on behalf of another student, I received this reply: "I have never heard of a complaint form." When I asked students on my school's campus, they all said they?d never seen anything about AB 537, which gives them the right to file a complaint, and only one student had even heard of it (the vice president of my GSA club). Does it really need to take 11 years and one student who has been trained and is well-informed about their rights for the administration of a school to recognize a law? If so, how much would it take for the school to enforce the law? Schools should not be allowed to wait for an informed student to address discrimination and/or harassment. EVERY student in the U.S. should be protected equally under the law.?

**James Patch from Menlo Park, CA:** ?Teachers are the authority figures we look up to for all the years we?re in school, not including college. If they let things slide, then we as students think that it is okay to say stuff like ?That?s so gay? or ?No homo,? even if it is hurting others. I realized I had some sort of feeling for the masculine gender around the end of middle school, but because of all the slurs aimed at LGBTQ people, I felt unsafe and insecure about my emotions. It took GSA meetings, and having the GSA advisor as my own English teacher, to make me feel safe so I could open up to my classmates and say that I am questioning my sexual orientation. I feel that if teachers would have shot down the slurs, I could have come out earlier and had more support and understanding of what I?m going through.?

**Ray Ferronato, sophomore from Antioch, CA:** ?Many instances in my life have occurred when I felt uncomfortable and unsafe due to anti-LGBTQ slurs in class, and the teacher in charge of the class did nothing to stop this kind of violent and hateful behavior. The fact that now the White House has heard concerns about these sorts of instances straight from the mouths of LGBTQ and allied youth, makes me feel a lot less stressed that future generations might have to endure the same feelings I did.?

**Claudia Chen**

?I feel that many people (youth and adults alike!) have misconceptions about what LGBTQ youth advocate for or want to see change. For concerns such as the need for a safe school environment or issues of bullying to be brought up in lieu of more publicized topics (e.g., marriage equality, Don?t Ask Don?t Tell) is definitely crucial in these youth roundtable discussions. For me, the most important issue brought up during the White House Roundtable had to be the relevance and importance of implementing student protection laws at the federal level. As a queer youth activist of color, I find that many of my identities (e.g., my racial background, age, sexuality, gender expression, gender identity) are and have been used against me. Though I'm continuously pushing for school policy updates and discipline reforms similar to the ones in [Seth's Law](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, California's current legislation has made it easier to get my point across. I imagine that having federal laws that protect against the same types of discrimination would also be beneficial not only to me, but to other LGBTQ and ally youth across the nation.?

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**Source URL:** <https://gsanetwork.org/news/blog/white-house-called-asked-how-they-could-make-it-better/06/03/11>

#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/03/09/president-obama-announces-100-youth-roundtables>

[2] <https://gsanetwork.org/news/seth%E2%80%99s-law-passes-state-assembly/060211>