



March 21, 2014

Secretary Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

Today, I write to you, an unparalleled advocate for our nation's young people and a stalwart supporter of the equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, to seek your help in resolving an ongoing instance of anti-LGBT discrimination in Sheridan, Arkansas.

When the Sheridan High School yearbook staff selected Taylor Ellis to be profiled in the annual yearbook alongside several other students, the young man reacted the way any high school junior might. He was thrilled, but he was also a little nervous. Taylor had made up his mind to take that opportunity to tell the truth about himself, so that the people in his small town would know that he's more than just a standout student, headed for the National Guard. He's also proudly and openly gay.

Yet when that yearbook was submitted to the school's administrator for final approval, the principal deleted Taylor's profile, no questions asked. When Taylor's deeply supportive mom spoke with the principal to ask why, the principal, in no uncertain terms, said that he had deleted it because Taylor was gay. In this instance, the adults who are supposed to stop bullying had become the bullies themselves.

It's simply unacceptable that, rather than respecting Taylor's peers' choice to recognize and celebrate this young man in the school yearbook, these school officials have sent a clear message that the courage and honesty Taylor has demonstrated are not valued at Sheridan High School.

Even though this episode is already attracting extensive local and national media attention, we feel there is still time for the school and the state to reverse course and send a powerful message of inclusion. I have already urged his school, his school district, the Arkansas Department of Education and the Governor of Arkansas to end this censorship. Sadly, they have all refused to take action. On behalf of Taylor and his family, I urge you to speak out against this discrimination and urge your counterparts in Arkansas to allow Taylor's courageous story to be a part of his yearbook.

On behalf of the Human Rights Campaign's 1.5 million members and supporters, I thank you for your continued commitment to equality for young people everywhere.
Sincerely,

Chad Griffin
President
Human Rights Campaign

cc Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights