



HUMAN
RIGHTS
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The Honorable Councilmember David Grosso
Chair, Committee on Education
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 5
Washington, DC 20004

October 23, 2015

Re: SUPPORT DC B21-361, Youth Suicide Prevention and Climate Survey Act of 2015

Dear Chairperson Grosso and Members of the Committee on Education:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), on behalf of our nearly 20,000 members in the District, thanks you for holding a hearing on the Youth Suicide Prevention and Climate Survey Act of 2015 (B21-361), which will require all school staff to complete suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention training each year and require local education associations to adopt suicide prevention policies. We urge you to pass this important legislation.

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. The passage of this suicide prevention legislation is critical to ensure the safety and well-being of young people in the District.

The Youth Suicide Prevention and Climate Survey Act (B21-361) would require school staff to complete two hours of comprehensive suicide prevention training every year. Suicide prevention training will provide school staff with the skills necessary to identify and assist youth who are at risk or in crisis.

Of particular importance is the bill's recognition of categories of youth that are at a higher risk of suicide, including youth who engage in self-harm or have attempted suicide, youth in out-of-home settings, and LGBT youth. Inclusive suicide prevention training which discusses LGBT youth is critical because these young people may experience family rejection, bullying and harassment, or stigmatization for simply being who they are, all of which can be added risk factors for suicide. Research suggests nearly half of all transgender youth experience suicidal ideation and LGB youth are 3-4 times more likely to attempt

suicide than their non-LGBT peers.¹ Suicide prevention training that both recognizes and requires an accepting and supportive school environment is essential to the safety and well-being of LGBT youth.

Furthermore, this bill is critical because suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people ages 10-19.² In fact, 2 students in a typical high school will attempt suicide in any given year. It is essential then that school districts adopt policies and procedures concerning suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.³ Overall, the school polices required by the Youth Suicide Prevention and Climate Survey Act will reduce the risk of suicide, help school staff address these tragedies appropriately, and prevent suicide contagion.

If this bill is passed, the District will join 25 states which currently have laws that require educators to receive suicide prevention training and 8 states that require school districts to have suicide prevention policies in place.⁴ The Youth Suicide Prevention and Climate Survey Act will enhance the safety of the District's schools and help protect students, educators, and parents from these tragic circumstances.

We urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation. If you should have any questions regarding HRC's support for B21-361, please contact me at 202-572-8960 or by email at Alison.Gill@hrc.org.

Sincerely,



Alison Gill, Esq.
Senior Legislative Counsel
Human Rights Campaign

¹ See *Facts About Suicide*. Washington, DC: The Trevor Project. Available at: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/facts-about-suicide>

² See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System*. Available at: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars

³ See, e.g., *Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention*. Washington, DC: The Trevor Project, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American School Counselor Association, and National Association of School Psychologists (2013). Available at: https://www.afsp.org/content/download/10555/186750/file/Model%20Policy_FINAL.pdf

⁴ See *State Laws on Suicide Prevention Training for School Personnel*. Washington, DC: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Available at www.afsp.org/advocacy-public-policy/state-policy/suicide-prevention-training-for-school-personnel.