



For Immediate Release

Media Contact

Daryl Presgraves
646-388-6577
dpresgraves@glsen.org

Maryland Becomes 7th State to Enact Anti-Bullying Law that Protects All Students *Law Includes Protections for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*

ANNAPOLIS, May 13, 2008 – Equality Maryland and GLSEN are proud to announce that Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley today signed into law a comprehensive anti-bullying bill that protects all students from bullying and harassment, becoming only the seventh state to enumerate categories of protection that include sexual orientation and gender identity.

"This is a historic day for Maryland students," GLSEN Executive Director Kevin Jennings said. "We applaud Governor O'Malley and the bipartisan supporters in the Maryland legislature for taking action to make Maryland schools safer. Feeling safe in school is directly related to academic achievement and student success. This law is an important step in reducing bullying, improving school climate and making school better for all Maryland students."

The landmark bill makes Maryland just the 11th state to protect students from bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and only the seventh to protect students on the basis of gender identity/expression. Maryland already requires schools to report bullying incidents. This law will now require each school district to develop bullying prevention programs for students, staff, volunteers and parents.

Passage of the comprehensive Maryland bill is particularly important because research shows that safe schools laws that specifically enumerate protected categories are more effective than laws that do not.

In GLSEN's 2005 National School Climate Survey, chronicling the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students in schools, LGBT students who were covered by a comprehensive safe school policy that specifically protects sexual orientation were less likely to report being harassed at school (31.6% vs. 40.8%), far more likely to tell school officials when incidents of harassment occurred (26.4% vs. 16.1%) and more than twice as likely to have a teacher intervene when harassment occurred versus students covered by a non-enumerated, or "generic," policy.

In fact, having a non-enumerated policy in place made virtually no difference to student experience versus having no anti-bullying policy at all.

Enumerated anti-bullying policies also have a beneficial effect for the student population as a whole, LGBT and non-LGBT alike. The 2005 GLSEN report *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America*, conducted by Harris Interactive, found that students whose schools have a policy that specifically includes sexual orientation or gender identity/expression are less likely than other students to report a serious harassment problem at their school (33% vs. 44%).

"Equality Maryland is thrilled that this common sense measure, which specifically addresses bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity, has transcended the politics of division with its overwhelming, bi-partisan passage and enactment into law," said Dan Furmansky, Executive Director of Equality Maryland. "It's crucial that Maryland take bolder steps to address bullying, harassment and intimidation of our students, and this is a good step in making sure schools in no way gloss over the harassment, threats and violence directed specifically at LGBT and questioning youth."

Besides Maryland, the 10 other states to include protection for sexual orientation in a safe schools law are California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin. Only California, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey and Vermont also include gender expression.

About Equality Maryland

Equality Maryland is Maryland's largest LGBT civil rights organization, focused on making life better for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens of Maryland. Equality Maryland works to secure and protect the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Marylanders by promoting legislative initiatives on the state, county and municipal levels and educating the public about the issues faced by our diverse community. To find Equality Maryland on the web, visit www.equalitymaryland.org.

About GLSEN

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established nationally in 1995, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. For more information on GLSEN's educational resources, public policy agenda, student organizing programs, research, public education or development initiatives, visit www.glsen.org.

###