
By Mr. Rushing of Boston, petition of Byron Rushing, other members of the General Court and another for legislation to prohibit discrimination against students in public schools on the basis of sexual orientation. Education, Arts and Humanities.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-Three.

**AN ACT TO PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST STUDENTS IN PUBLIC
SCHOOLS ON THE BASIS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 Section 5 of chapter 76 of the General Laws, as appearing in
2 the nineteen hundred ninety Official Edition, is hereby amended
3 by striking out the second sentence and inserting in place thereof
4 the following sentence: — No person shall be excluded from or
5 discriminated against an admission to a public school of any town,
6 or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study
7 of such public school on account of race, color, sex, religion,
8 national origin, or sexual orientation.

THE COALITION FOR LESBIAN AND GAY CIVIL RIGHTS

State House, P.O.Box 206

Boston, Mass. 02133

828-3039

THE GAY AND LESBIAN STUDENTS RIGHTS BILL

WHAT DOES THIS BILL DO?

H. 3353, "An Act to Prohibit Discrimination Against Students in Public Schools on the Basis of Sexual Orientation" would protect gay and lesbian students against discrimination in admission to any public school or access to school courses and school activities.

H.3353 adds the phrase "sexual orientation" to the current list of categories protecting students against discrimination.

Massachusetts law(chapter 5 of chapter 76 of the General Laws), currently protects students from discrimination in public schools on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, and national origin. This bill would add sexual orientation to these categories.

HOUSE AND SENATE SPONSORS

H. 3353 was filed by the Student Advisory Council, a statewide network of over 700 students. The Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights has actively worked for passage of this bill as well.

The Gay and Lesbian Students Rights Bill has strong support in both branches of the Massachusetts legislature. Rep. Byron Rushing (D-Boston) is the chief sponsor in the House. There are a total of thirty-three co-sponsors in the House. Senator Robert Havern(D-Arlington) is the lead sponsor in the Senate. There are a total of ten co-sponsors in the Senate.

Governor Weld has pledged to sign the bill into law. The bill is supported by Education Commissioner Robert Antonucci, Secretary of Education Piedad Robertson, and Michael Duffy, Chair of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination.

WHAT PROBLEMS DOES THIS BILL ADDRESS?

Gay and lesbian students face discrimination, violence, and harassment in public schools on a daily basis. Lacking legal protections afforded other students, their human and educational rights are constantly threatened.

AN UNSAFE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOL

Violence and harassment against gay students are regular occurrences in Massachusetts schools. A survey of 400 students at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School conducted by the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth found that 97% of the students reported hearing homophobic remarks in school. Yet few schools have policies which protect gay students against harassment and verbal abuse.

DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 28% of gay youth drop out of school altogether because of discomfort in the school setting. This law would establish guidelines which could lower the drop-out rate and make gay and lesbian students feel protected and safe in school.

SUICIDE AND ISOLATION

Isolation from peers and failure to be included within normal school activities contribute to feelings of rejection and aloneness on the part of gay and lesbian teenagers. Suicide is the leading cause of death for gay and lesbian youth, according to the "Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1989).

Gay and lesbian youth account for 30% of completed youth suicides annually. Gay youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.

THE RIGHT TO A PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION IN A SAFE SCHOOL

This law would affirm the dignity and worth of gay and lesbian students in the school setting. It would set a standard of respect for gay and lesbian students in our public schools. The law would protect their fundamental rights to education and could be used to urge schools to take appropriate measures to prevent violence against gay students and ensure their safety in school at all times.