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Supporting gay youth

"For many gay and lesbian students, school is not a place of learning but a place where they feel profoundly isolated, sometimes even suicidal, a place where they are abused and terrorized by violence for being different."

This statement, drafted by Gov. Weld's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, is the basis for its recommendations to the state Board of Education, which will consider them today. Members of the board must bear the commission's statement in mind as they consider the recommendations.

The governor's commission was formed in February 1992 after data from the federal government revealed that gay and lesbian youth were committing and attempting suicide at alarming rates and were at risk for dropping out of school, using drugs and ending up homeless.

The commission's recommendations include encouraging school systems to create school environments in which harassment and discrimination against gay and lesbian students will not be toler-

ated and to develop training programs for teachers and other staff members to sensitize them to the problems gay and lesbian students face.

One recommendation would encourage the formation of support groups for students such as those that exist in Cambridge, Newton, Brookline and Lincoln-Sudbury high schools. The commission also recommended that counseling be made available to gay and lesbian students, who may be at risk for suicide or dropping out of school, and to the members of their families.

The commission is not making any curriculum recommendations. It does hope, however, that the training for teachers will have a positive impact on curriculum decisions.

The state has an obligation to guarantee equal educational opportunity and a safe environment for all of the commonwealth's students. No student should be deprived of that opportunity because of his or her sexual orientation.