Dear Member of Congress:

We are 82 national and state organizations who are committed to ensuring that *all* students are able to pursue an education unhindered by discrimination and harassment. We write to request your support and cosponsorship of the Student Non-Discrimination Act.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act ("SNDA") would establish a comprehensive federal prohibition against discrimination and harassment in public elementary and secondary schools across the country based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. SNDA would provide lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender ("LGBT") students with long overdue and much needed explicit federal protections against discrimination and harassment. The legislation also protects students who associate with LGBT people, including students with LGBT parents and friends.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act is sponsored by Senator Al Franken and Representatives Jared Polis and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. As previously introduced in the 112th Congress, the legislation garnered bipartisan support, including the support of 39 senators and 171 representatives.

There is overwhelming evidence establishing a compelling need for action at the federal level to protect LGBT students from discrimination and harassment in schools. A 2011 study of more than 8,500 LGBT middle and high school students across the US found that eight out of ten reported experiencing harassment at their school within the past year based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, and three-fifths said they felt unsafe at school because of who they are. Nearly three in ten skipped at least one day of school within the previous month because of concerns for their safety. Most tragically, LGBT youth face significantly increased risks for suicide related to mental health issues that often arise from poor treatment and discrimination in schools. It is critical that the federal government and schools act to address this very serious problem facing LGBT youth.

Further, while federal laws currently protect students on the basis of their race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin, no federal statute explicitly protects students on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The Student Non-Discrimination Act would do just that. In addition, nearly fifty years of civil rights history clearly demonstrate that laws similar to the proposed Student Non-Discrimination Act are effective in preventing discrimination and harassment from occurring in the first place by prompting schools to take proactive steps to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students who are in their care.

¹ GLSEN National School Climate Survey 2011.

² See, e.g., Massachusetts Youth Risk Survey 2007; Grossman, A.H., D'Augelli, A.R. (2007). "Transgender youth and life threatening behaviors." Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior, 37(5): 527-537.

The Student Non-Discrimination Act presents us with a historic opportunity to offer critical protections to current and future generations of LGBT youth and their student allies by ensuring that discrimination against and harassment of students on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity will have no place in our country's public elementary and secondary schools.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth

African American Ministers in Action

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Civil Liberties Union

American Counseling Association

American Federation of Teachers

American Humanist Association

American Psychological Association

American School Counselor Association

Amnesty International USA

Asian American Justice Center, member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO/Institute for Asian Pacific American

Leadership & Advancement

Association of Flight Attendants - CWA

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Center for American Progress Action Fund

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

Child Welfare League of America

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund

Education Law Center

Family Equality Council

Feminist Majority

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)

Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network)

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network

GetEQUAL

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality

Healthy Teen Network

Human Rights Campaign

Immigration Equality Action Fund

Interfaith Alliance

Iowa Pride Network

Lambda Legal

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

League of United Latin American Citizens

Learning Disabilities Association of America

LGBT Humanist Council

Log Cabin Republicans

Maryland Multicultural Coalition/State Chapter of NAME (National Association for

Multicultural Education)

Minnesota AIDS Project

NAACP

National Association for Multicultural Education

National Association of School Psychologists

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Black Justice Coalition

National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Center for Transgender Equality

National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of La Raza

National Council of Women's Organizations

National Crittenton Foundation

National Education Association

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health

National Minority AIDS Council

National Network for Youth

National Women's Law Center

People For the American Way

PFLAG National

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education)

School Social Work Association of America

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

Southern Poverty Law Center

The Emily Program

The Trevor Project

Transgender Law Center

Unid@s

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

Wider Opportunities for Women

Women's Law Project

Youth Activism Project

YP4 Action