Welcome to the GLSEN Policy Postcard, a monthly newsletter for GLSEN staff and GLSEN Policy Coordinators to keep abreast of the happenings in the LGBTQ+ and education spheres. The goals of this project are to facilitate communication, community, and collaboration, so please feel free to ask questions, provide comments, or share ideas at policy@glsen.org.

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Toplines and Fast Facts

ACTION ALERT
Tell Congress to Support the Safe Schools Improvement Act:
The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) will transform the way that K-12 learning communities prevent, respond to, and measure bullying and harassment experienced by students, including those who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. There are currently 168 House co-sponsors of the SSIA, but more support is needed to push the bill through Congress. Help to build the momentum in support of the SSIA and send a message to your legislators asking them to co-sponsor the bill. To learn more about GLSEN’s public policy advocacy, please take a look at our 2022 Public Policy Agenda.

Next GLSEN Public Policy Coordinator Meeting:
The next Policy Coordinator zoom call will take place on February 16 at 8:00pm ET. Note that the agenda for this call will be shared soon, so please contact Tessa Juste, State and Local Policy Manager, to propose agenda items.

Administrative Updates

Last week GLSEN Executive Director, Melanie Willingham-Jaggers provided testimony in a listening session on school discipline hosted by the US Department of Education (USED) Office for Civil Rights. The listening session sought stakeholder input on how to refine and clarify definitions of “referral to law enforcement” and “school-related arrests” that are used for questions asked in the Civil Rights Data Collection. Last month GLSEN also co-led a meeting with interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth informing USED on key issues facing intersex students, including issues of equity, school climate, data collection, and Title IX protections.

Additionally, last month GLSEN signed on to a letter led by Athlete Ally and the Human Rights Campaign, which urged the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) board of governors to re-adopt sexual orientation and gender identity nondiscrimination language in the new NCAA constitution. The letter emphasizes the need for a comprehensive nondiscrimination policy from the NCAA, so that transgender and nonbinary athletes are not left to navigate a patchwork of differing protections. You can read the letter to the NCAA here.
Updates from the Hill

GLSEN continues to push for Congress to pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA). The total number of house co-sponsors continues to rise; currently the count is up to 168. The SSIA would protect every student from bullying and harassment in K-12 learning communities. It would ensure that local education agencies adopt evidence-based best practices to prevent and effectively respond to bullying and harassment. GLSEN has published a fact-sheet where you can learn more about why we need to pass the SSIA. You can also send a letter to Congress urging them to pass the SSIA using this action alert form. For further information on GLSEN’s public policy activities, please refer to our 2022 Public Policy Agenda.

Last month GLSEN signed on to a letter led by the We Must Count Coalition, requesting $150 million in funding for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Data Modernization Initiative. This initiative aims to strengthen data collection on LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and other communities that experience marginalization. You can read the letter in full here.

This month GLSEN signed on to a letter led by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, urging Congress to address racial discrimination as a central issue to reforms proposed in the Electoral Count Act and other bills that seek to protect our Democracy. Specifically, the letter notes that the Electoral Count Act fails to address the racially discriminatory barriers to voting, and urges that this legislation be amended to include key components of the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act. You can read the letter here.

State Public Policy Updates

Throughout the state legislative cycle GLSEN tracks bills that have been introduced in the legislatures of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the US territories. Currently GLSEN is tracking 21 bills that are affirming of LGBTQ+ students and inclusive K-12 learning communities, and 176 bills that are negative towards LGBTQ+ students. The bills of greatest concern in the near term are: “Don’t Say Gay” bills in Florida (SB 1834/HB 1557) and Missouri (HB 1995/ HB 1474); “critical race theory” bans in Florida (HB 7), South Dakota (HB 1012/ HB 1337), and Georgia (HB1084); a ban on transgender students participating in athletics in Indiana; attempts to ban gender affirming medical care for minors in Arizona (SB 1138) and Tennessee (HB 0578); and a discriminatory anti-trans bathroom bill in South Dakota (HB 1005). To learn more about the specific content and legislative progress of the state bills that GLSEN is tracking, you can visit our 2022 Affirmative Bill Tracker and our 2022 Negative Bill Tracker.

This month GLSEN published an action alert for folks to write letters to their legislators in Florida opposing HB 1557/ SB 1834, known as the ‘Don’t Say Gay’ bill. This dangerous legislation would ban positive visibility of LGBTQ+ communities in school curriculum. There’s even an outrageous provision that puts students at greater risk of being outed to family members who don’t affirm their identities. Florida residents can take action and send a message to their legislators telling them to vote against this harmful legislation here.

Last week, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem signed SB 46, a ban on transgender student athletics participation. GLSEN has released a statement condemning the signing of the bill. The statement highlights the importance of the opportunity to participate in school sports for transgender students, and emphasizes that the passage of this bill into law underscores the need for comprehensive federal protections for LGBTQ+ students. You can read the full statement here. You can also check out our issue brief on gender affirming and inclusive athletics participation to learn more about why it is so important that transgender students are able to fully participate in all aspects of their learning communities, including athletics.
What We’re Watching in the News

GLSEN Appoints their First Black Non-binary Executive Director to Defend LGBTQ Youth.
This article is about the appointment of GLSEN’s new Executive Director, Melanie Willingham-Jaggers.

Conservatives Attack LGBTQ-Inclusive Education Under the Guise of ‘Parental Rights’.
This article discusses the disturbing trend of ‘parental rights’ bills that claim to be an effort to promote transparency, but in reality bans or chills the teaching of inclusive curriculum and in some cases requires schools to out students to their parents.

Florida’s ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Bill Aims to Limit LGBTQ Discussions in Schools.
This article is about the Don’t Say Gay bill that has been introduced in Florida.

Arizona Bill Would Make Teachers Reveal to Parents if Kids Came Out as LGBTQ.
This article is about the particularly egregious outing provision embedded within the ‘parent’s bill of rights’ legislation that has been introduced in Arizona.

Librarians Fight Back Against Efforts to Ban Books in Schools.
David Montgomery. Education Week, January 18, 2022.
This article is about the librarian-led counter movement that is brewing in response to Texas elected officials’ efforts to ban LGBTQ+ books and books that discuss race and racism.

For assistance with media inquiries, please contact GLSEN’s Communications Office.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, ADDITIONS?
Have a note to add for next month’s postcard? See a mistake that needs correcting? Want more resources or information? Let us know what you would like, and even what you would like less of. Please contact policy@glsen.org.