

**The Problem**

Bullying and harassment of students who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) is widespread. While current federal law provides important support to promote school safety, it does not comprehensively and expressly focus on issues of bullying or harassment, and in no way addresses the unique challenges faced by LGBT youth. Studies have shown that bullying and harassment of LGBT youth in schools contributes to high rates of absenteeism, dropout, adverse health consequences and academic underachievement. When left unchecked, such bullying and harassment can lead to, and has led to, life-threatening violence and suicide. LGBT students, like all other students, deserve a healthy school environment.

**The Solution**

The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to require schools and districts receiving federal funds to adopt codes of conduct specifically prohibiting bullying and harassment, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The SSIA would also require that states report data on bullying and harassment to the Department of Education. Additionally, the SSIA would require the Department of Education to provide Congress with a report on the state reported data, along with other specified data, every two years.

**Catholic Support**

- Catholics accept people as they are. 69% of U.S. Catholics believe that homosexuality cannot be changed. Public Religion Research Institute, 2011.
- 73% of U.S. Catholics favor laws to protect gays and lesbians in the workplace. Public Religion Research Institute, 2011.

**Catholic Talking Points**

- Catholic social teaching regarding the dignity of each person instills respect for all people.
- Catholics are called to defend the marginalized and oppressed of society.
- The Safe Schools Improvement Act includes broad religious exemptions and does not apply to our church, nor any of our privately funded church organizations, schools, and programs.

**Catholic Social Teaching and Scripture**

- Homosexual persons "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided." – Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2358.
- "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." – Luke 10:27 (New American Bible)

**Catholic Constituent Faces of the Safe Schools Improvement Act:** Available upon request