

Two Pennsylvania Bills Target LGBTQ Students and Families

June 23, 2022 - Public schools must be welcoming and affirming to all children and safe places for learning and growth. On June 21, the PA Senate Education Committee advanced legislation that would do the opposite – remove books that are objectionable to a small number of parents, threaten teachers with lawsuits, harm LGBTQ families and children, and stifle normal discussions between children and trusted adults.

Senator Scott Martin’s bill, [SB 1278](#), is Pennsylvania’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill, which would require teachers to ignore the presence of LGBTQ students and families and face legal action by parents if teachers initiate any discussion about a gay family or a transgender student in the classroom. It promotes ignorance and falsehood over education and makes inclusion impossible.

The bill shows a complete lack of compassion and understanding for thousands of gay and transgender students and families, who want and are entitled to be treated fairly at school and in their communities. These students are already [singled out](#) for bullying and harassment, and the bills would put them at greater risk for harm, self-harm, and suicide.

Senator Ryan Aument’s bill, [SB 1277](#), would result in the removal of books for all children because of objections of a small group of parents. The legislation as written is broad and unconstitutionally vague. In practice, parents and school boards have objected primarily to books about LGBTQ youth and books addressing racism. Such targeted discrimination is unlawful, and it is wrong.

These bills will create a hostile school environment for LGBTQ youth and families, drive more teachers from the field, and prevent students from sharing critical concerns with nurses, counselors, and teachers – people whom they rely on for help.

It is troubling that at this critical juncture, these legislators are focused on sowing division, demonizing educators, and denigrating students rather than addressing the grave needs of our students. ELC urges the Senate to abandon this state mandate over local educational decisions and renounce the bullying of teachers and students that this legislation promotes.

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness.