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The Honorable Sen. Becky Harris
Chair, Senate Committee on Education
Legislative Building, Room 2135
401 S. Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701-4747

The Honorable Asw. Melissa Woodbury
Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
Legislative Building, Room 3142
401 S. Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701-4747

March 30, 2015

Re: **SUPPORT for SB 204, Testimony from the Human Rights Campaign for the Joint Meeting of the Senate Committee on Education and the Assembly Committee on Education.**

Dear Chairperson Harris and Chairperson Woodbury:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. HRC believes that all youth deserve a safe educational environment that is free of bullying and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. On behalf of HRC's thousands of members in Nevada, we thank you for allowing us to submit testimony in favor of SB 204, which will protect youth in Nevada from bullying and discrimination. We urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation.

The passage of this anti-bullying legislation is critical to ensure the safety and well-being young people in Nevada. Bullying and harassment has become a serious public health crisis in our nation's schools. Nationally, sixty-five percent of teens have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted based on a characteristic that makes them different from some of their peers, like their race, religion, or gender, and sixty-five percent of junior high school teachers report that bullying and harassment is a serious problem in their school.ⁱ In Nevada in 2013, nearly 20% (1 in 5) of students reported being bullied on school property and nearly 15% reported experiencing cyberbullying.ⁱⁱ

Bullying and harassment has often increased adverse effects on marginalized students, including those who identify as LGBT. A national survey of LGBT youth showed that nearly 75% of LGBT students experience verbal or physical harassment in school.ⁱⁱⁱ LGBT students who experienced high levels of victimization were three times as likely to be absent from school and had grades on average a half a grade lower than their peers. Though these statistics reflect the experiences of LGBT students, consequences like absenteeism, lowered educational aspirations and academic achievement, and poorer psychological well-being can affect all students who experience bullying and harassment.

Research demonstrates that a crucial part of addressing bullying and harassment in schools is the adoption of enumerated anti-bullying policies, meaning policies that protect all students but that identify characteristics that are commonly targeted for bullying and harassment. Enumeration is necessary to ensure that anti-bullying policies provide protection for marginalized students such as LGBT youth. Students who attend schools with enumerated policies report less bullying and harassment and a higher rate of intervention by teachers when bullying occurs.^{iv} We applaud the sponsors of this legislation for making the bill as inclusive as possible.



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While SB 504 also has several important provisions to ensure that youth in Nevada are protected from bullying and cyberbullying, we are concerned because this legislation does not provide specific protection to transgender students. Such students suffer disproportionate rates of bullying and should be protected by adding the terms “gender identity” to the definition of bullying in SB 504. Nevada’s largest school district, Clark County,^v the state’s education non-discrimination laws,^{vi} and federal law^{vii} already protect transgender students from harassment and discrimination. Passing an anti-bullying measure without including this category of vulnerable students would create inconsistent and conflicting law, putting schools and students in an unclear situation.

We strongly support SB 204, comprehensive anti-bullying legislation which will help ensure the safety of all youth in Nevada. We also would support SB 504 if gender identity protections were added. If you should have any questions regarding HRC’s support for these bills, please contact me at 202-572-8960 or by email at Alison.Gill@hrc.org.

Sincerely,

Alison Gill, Esq.
Senior Legislative Counsel
Human Rights Campaign

ⁱ Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN. Available at

<http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/From%20Teasing%20to%20Torment%20Full%20Report.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Available at www.cdc.gov/yrbps. Accessed on March 30, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation’s schools*. New York: GLSEN. Available at http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report_0.pdf

^{iv} Id.

^v Clark County School District Policy P-5137, *Safe and Respectful Learning Environment: Bullying and Cyberbullying* (2015). Available at http://ccsd.net/district/policies-regulations/pdf/5137_P.pdf

^{vi} NRS 657.070, et seq.

^{vii} U.S. Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014). *Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence*. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf>