



## Transgender and Gender Non-Binary Students Deserve Safe & Sustaining School Environments

**IDRA Testimony against Senate Bill 88, submitted by Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., to  
the Georgia Senate Education and Youth Committee, August 23, 2023**

Good Morning, Chairman Dixon and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mikayla Arciaga M.A. Ed., I use she/her pronouns and I am the Georgia Advocacy Director at IDRA, a, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools. I am also a former Georgia teacher, swim coach, and sponsor of the gay-straight alliances in my previous schools.

We oppose Senate Bill 88 because we believe the bill will result in inconsistent and discriminatory policies that will harm not just students who identify as transgender or nonbinary, but all our students.

### **SB 88 Lacks Discrimination Protections for Gender Identity**

Children cannot learn in spaces where they do not feel safe, and there is already existing evidence that LGBTQ+ students in Georgia are experiencing bullying and harassment in our schools every day (GLSEN, 2021; Kosciw, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, we are seeing the erasure of diverse authors and materials because local administrators in Georgia are bypassing established procedures. This week we alone have received reports of administrators censoring authors and texts in both Forsyth & Cobb counties (Amy, 2023). These inconsistencies indicate that local district officials may not have the required expertise to ensure that they develop policies which are sensitive and inclusive of issues of gender identity. If you move forward with this bill, language must be included emphasizing the protections against gender discrimination for transgender or nonbinary students, and the need for evidence-based training for educators to support students and families in creating safe and affirming school environments.

Policies and proposals like SB 88 have real, life or death consequences for students as tragically 45% of LGBTQ+ youth consider attempting suicide, including more than half of transgender and non-binary youth. Such suicide attempts are also more common among youth of color as the suicide rate of Indigenous LGBTQ+ youth (21%) is almost double the rate of white students, while Black (19%), multiracial (17%), and Latino (16%) youth all have higher rates of suicide attempts than their white peers (12%). (Trevor Project, 2022)

## **SB 88 May Make it Harder for Schools to Support LGBTQ+ Students**

Legislation like SB 88 discourages teachers and school staff from creating safe and welcoming places for their LGBTQ+ students. We are already seeing educators being directed away from incorporating best practices, such as using a students' desired pronouns to acknowledge them, supporting student-led clubs such as gay-straight alliances or gender and sexuality alliances that promote a safe and welcoming environment for students of all orientations and genders, and identifying "safe spaces," such as counselor's offices or designated classrooms where LGBTQ+ students and their families can receive support from administrators, teachers or other school staff (CDC, 2023).

Georgia leaders have the responsibility to ensure that *all* students are supported at school, even when they are not supported elsewhere. We encourage you to return SB 88 to the table and invest in legislation that will promote safe and supporting school environments for all of our students,

### **Recommendations**

- Support safe and welcoming schools by rejecting SB 88;
- Support policies that promote comprehensive school policies regarding bullying and sexual harassment that specifically speak to protections around gender identity.
- Provide resources so schools can adopt research-based school climate strategies that make all students feel safe and welcome.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., IDRA Georgia Advocacy Director at [mikayla.arciaga@idra.org](mailto:mikayla.arciaga@idra.org).

### **Resources**

- Amy, J. (2023). Georgia School District is Banning Books Citing Sexual Content, After Firing a Teacher. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/georgia-school-district-banning-books-citing-sexual-content-102467050>
- CDC. (2023). LGBTQ+ Youth: Addressing Health Disparities with a School-Based Approach. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm#print>
- GLSEN. (2021). School Climate for LGBTQ Students in Georgia. [https://maps.glsen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/GLSEN\\_2021\\_NSCS\\_State\\_Snapshots\\_GA.pdf](https://maps.glsen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/GLSEN_2021_NSCS_State_Snapshots_GA.pdf)
- IDRA. (October 2019). Focus: Gender Justice. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/nlOct19p>
- IDRA. (2019). School Climate Affects LGBTQ Student Well-being, infographic. <https://idra.news/iGlgbtq19>
- Kosciw, J.G., Clark, C.M., Truong, N.L., & Zongrone, A.D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey – The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools. GLSEN. <https://www.glsen.org/research/2019-national-school-climate-survey>
- NEA. (June 2016). Legal Guidance on Transgender Students' Rights. National Education Association. [https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2018\\_Legal%20Guidance\\_Transgender%20Student%20Rights.pdf](https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2018_Legal%20Guidance_Transgender%20Student%20Rights.pdf)
- Shaffer, S., & Lerner, P. (October 2017). Supporting LGBTQ Students Faced with Sexual & Gender Harassment. IDRA Newsletter. <https://budurl.me/IDRAnlOct17c>
- Trevor Project. (2021). 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

*IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.*