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Equality Act Testimony: Bullying and Harassment of LGBT Youth

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The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. Senate

Dear Chair Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and Members:

I am writing in support of S. 393/H.R. 5 which proposes to extend nondiscrimination protections to all U.S. residents in many domains of life, including education. As a social epidemiologist, my research focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity-based differences in socioeconomic status. According to my estimations, there are over 3.5 million LGBT students ages 15 and up in the United States [1].

Of these, 2.1 million students across 36 states would obtain protection from sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination through the passage of H.R. 5, because their state currently does not have a civil rights law that explicitly includes sexual orientation and gender identity. Research documents that these students are vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and bullying that negatively impacts not only their education, but has lasting negative consequences for lifelong economic well-being, health, and civic engagement [1-15].

Several studies find higher rates of bullying in high school [2-4], and sexual and other physical violence victimization in college [5-9], among LGBT compared to heterosexual peers. Research also notes harassment of LGBT students by school staff and administrators at secondary and post-secondary levels [10-12]. Lastly, institutional policies and climate have also been found to vary widely in their inclusion and protection of LGBT students [10, 13-16].

Harassment and discrimination, at multiple points in the life course, are among the leading contributors to sexual orientation- and gender identity- based differences in educational attainment and economic well-being. For example, lower levels of education and higher rates of poverty have been observed among lesbian and bisexual women, bisexual men, and transgender adults compared to heterosexual, cisgender (non-transgender) peers in several population-based studies [17-24].

In summary, it is critical to extend for S. 393/H.R. 5 to extend federal protections to LGBT students.

Sincerely,
Kerith Jane Conron, ScD, MPH
Blachford-Cooper Research Director and Distinguished Scholar

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