

PRESS RELEASE

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Legislature Passes Bill to Promote Safer Schools *AB 394 Helps Schools Stop Bias and Discrimination Against Youth*

SACRAMENTO, CA – AB 394, the Safe Place to Learn Act, passed the Legislature early today to combat the rising incidence of hate crimes committed against youth in California K-12 schools. Authored by Assembly Member Lloyd Levine and co-sponsored by Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality (AACRE) and Equality California, this bill would require the California Department of Education (CDE) to monitor whether school districts in California are complying with existing requirements to prevent bias and discrimination in schools, including adopting nondiscrimination policies and resolving complaints.

AB 394 requires CDE to play an active role in ensuring full and proper implementation of school antidiscrimination laws that are already on the books in California. In addition to enforcing current state laws prohibiting bias-related discrimination and harassment, CDE will also make available on its centralized website best practices and resources to facilitate the adoption and implementation of nondiscrimination policies.

This bill responds to increasing reports of harassment and violence perpetrated against Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) youth. APIA students have been bullied, beaten, and in some instances, killed because of their perceived racial and ethnic differences, and also based on other protected characteristics, such as sexual orientation and religion.

“According to the California Student Survey, almost one-third of students report having been the victims of some form of harassment or violence based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or disability,” cites Angela Chan, Staff Attorney at Asian Law Caucus. “We’re seeing more Asian American youth experiencing harassment and violence in schools. Despite this disturbing trend, Asian Law Caucus found in our recent survey of California school districts that 31% of school districts surveyed do not have any anti-harassment and violence policies in place. It’s vital for school safety and to ensure an equal opportunity to learn for all students that schools promptly investigate and address incidents of harassment and violence.”

“A dangerous school environment inhibits effective learning. If a child is worried about his or her safety, he or she cannot concentrate on studies or will simply stay home out of fear. AB 394 helps to create a safer environment where students can learn without impediments,” states Karin Wang, Vice President of Programs at Asian Pacific American Legal Center.

“Schools that have not protected students from bias-related discrimination and harassment have been subject to costly legal settlements,” says Vincent Pan, Executive Director of Chinese for Affirmative Action. “For example, a jury awarded \$300,000 to two former high school pupils who were the victims of harassment based on sexual orientation at a San Diego school. AB 394 is designed to make safer schools and to prevent these lawsuits from occurring in the first place.”

AACRE is a partnership of Chinese for Affirmative Action, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, and Asian Law Caucus, dedicated to bringing a voice for California’s diverse APIA community to the state’s capital.

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