

A Letter to Our Community

We, the undersigned, stand in solidarity against all forms of hate.

We are a coalition of organizations and individuals who believe everyone should be treated with dignity and respect as a human being regardless of their race, religion, disability, ethnicity, national origin, gender or sexual orientation.

Whether a young child is being bullied on a playground or hate speech is being exchanged on “main street”, we will not be silent in the face of abuse. Both the highly publicized suicides of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning) youth across the nation and recent hate crimes here in Santa Barbara County are tragic reminders of the harm being inflicted on our community. Violence against any part of our community, whether physical or verbal, threatens our common humanity and makes our community less safe for everyone.

We say “no” to hate and recognize that it is intended to terrorize an entire community, to inflict fear on many of us who make up the very fabric of our communities - this may be you, your loved ones, your neighbor, your child’s teacher, your cousin or your friend. When someone is threatened or harmed because of their identity, a threat of harm has been made to all who share in that identity.

Due to the negative stigma that society places on non-traditional gender identity and sexual orientation, LGBTQ youth are more vulnerable to experiencing mental health issues that may lead to depression, substance abuse, anxiety, and in some cases, suicide. This is a grave matter that needs the attention and support of individuals working with youth.

We are concerned that incidents of bullying in our schools are under-reported and not effectively handled or preempted when they occur. We know all too well that homophobia in schools can become deadly as it did when Oxnard eighth-grader Lawrence King lost his life in 2008 at the hands of another student.

We expect our educational institutions, law enforcement, and other government agencies to commit to and follow through on efforts to create truly safe and inclusive environments for individuals of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We also hold our elected officials accountable for the creation and enforcement of inclusive policies that reflect the diversity of our community and provide for its safety. We commend the Santa Barbara School District for offering Safe Schools Training in June 2010. Although there are two additional trainings planned, a broader and deeper commitment must be made by all our public agencies.

Individually and collectively, it is our responsibility to create safe and welcoming environments for our youth today so that these horrible tragedies will end. We must work to ensure a better future for the generations who follow.

See signatories on next page

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OUR COMMITMENT

We will speak out against hatred in every form; intolerance cannot be allowed in our community.

We will be compassionate toward those targeted by prejudice, hatred, humiliation, bullying and other forms of violence.

We will respect the “coming out” process as a personal endeavor that should be handled with empathy.

We accept that protecting each other from hate and discrimination is not solely the responsibility of the groups targeted, but is the responsibility of every individual who cares about our community.

We will engage with law enforcement, schools, elected officials and other institutions to create safe environments for the LGBTQ community.

We commit to educating ourselves and examining our own biases, and to teaching our children values that create a culture of respect for all people.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Speak up! Violence and discrimination feed on silence, so we encourage you to open up dialogue with your family members, friends and colleagues about issues of homophobia. Communicate with schools about the importance of education that promotes respect and safety for all students, learn about issues affecting the LGBTQ community, and work to make the communities and organizations you're a part of welcoming and inclusive. And why not join us and become a signatory on this letter?

Signatories (as of 12/01/10)

ORGANIZATIONS:

CommUnity Leadership Institute CANDO (Change Agent Network for Dismantling Oppression)
FUND for Santa Barbara
G.R.A.C.E. Santa Maria (Gay Rights Advocates for Change and Equality)
Great Outdoors Santa Barbara / Ventura
Just Communities Central Coast
Pacific Pride Foundation
People United for Economic Justice Building Leadership through Organizing
Planned Parenthood of Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties
S.A.M.E. Strategic Alliance for Marriage Equality
San Marcos High School Gay-Straight Alliance
Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center
Santa Barbara Women's Political Committee
UCSB Queer Student Union
UCSB Rape Prevention Education Program
UCSB Resource Center for Sexual & Gender Diversity
UCSB Women's Center

INDIVIDUALS:

Margo Chapman
Sean Dooner

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Susan Dalton PhD
Debbie Fleming
Salvador Güereña (Chair, Dos Pueblos H.S. PTSA Committee on Equity & Excellence in Education)
Reverend Teena Grant
Geoff Green
Cheri Gurse
Carol Keator
Lisa Rothstein
Selma Rubin
Beth Schneider
Joe & Kathie Schneider
Catherine J. Swysen
Nancy Weiss
Janet Wolf, County Board of Supervisors

NOTE: this is fast growing list that started Friday October 8th, 2010 and we welcome any and all to join our efforts. If you or your organization would like to become a signatory please contact: Gary Clark at MrGaryClark@gmail.com

REFERENCE INFO

STATE POLICY ISSUES

The state Department of Education agrees that youth need tools to understand issues of sexual orientation and to promote safety in their schools; material related to respecting people of all sexual orientations is included in the California standards for junior high and high school students.

The California Legislature has passed AB 537, which states that public schools have a duty to protect students from discrimination and/or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

STATISTICS

School Harassment and Violence:

- 86.2% of LGBTQ students report being verbally harassed, 44.1% report being physically harassed, and 22.1% report being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- 60.8% of students report feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation.
- More than half of LGBT African American/Black, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial students also reported verbal harassment in school based on their race or ethnicity.
- 87% of transgender students report being harassed because of their gender expression.

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- 54% of transgender students who were victimized in school did not report the events to school authorities.
- This lack of safety affects students socially and academically. A third of LGBTQ students felt so unsafe that they missed class and LGBT students experience lower GPAs and college aspirations than straight students.

Source: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 2007-2009

Mental Health & Suicide:

- The harassment, violence and isolation faced by LGBTQ youth take a devastating toll on their mental health. LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Massachusetts 2006 Youth Risk Survey).
- LGBTQ youth who are rejected by their families are 5.9 times more likely to experience depression and anxiety and 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide (PEDIATRICS, 2009).