

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 846

To end discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity in public schools, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 10, 2015

Mr. POLIS (for himself, Mr. SCOTT of Virginia, and Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

A BILL

To end discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity in public schools, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Student Non-Discrimi-
5 nation Act of 2015”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.**

7 (a) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Public school students who are lesbian, gay,
9 bisexual or transgender (LGBT), or are perceived to

1 be LGBT, or who associate with LGBT people, have
2 been and are subjected to pervasive discrimination,
3 including harassment, bullying, intimidation and vio-
4 lence, and have been deprived of equal educational
5 opportunities, in schools in every part of our Nation.

6 (2) While discrimination, including harassment,
7 bullying, intimidation and violence, of any kind is
8 harmful to students and to our education system,
9 actions that target students based on sexual orienta-
10 tion or gender identity represent a distinct and espe-
11 cially severe problem.

12 (3) Numerous social science studies dem-
13 onstrate that discrimination, including harassment,
14 bullying, intimidation and violence, at school has
15 contributed to high rates of absenteeism, dropout,
16 adverse health consequences, and academic under-
17 achievement among LGBT youth.

18 (4) When left unchecked, discrimination, includ-
19 ing harassment, bullying, intimidation and violence,
20 in schools based on sexual orientation or gender
21 identity can lead, and has led to, life-threatening vio-
22 lence and to suicide.

23 (5) Public school students enjoy a variety of
24 constitutional rights, including rights to equal pro-
25 tection, privacy, and free expression, which are in-

1 fringed when school officials engage in discrimina-
2 tory treatment or are indifferent to discrimination,
3 including harassment, bullying, intimidation and vio-
4 lence, on the basis of sexual orientation or gender
5 identity.

6 (6) While Federal statutory protections ex-
7 pressly address discrimination on the basis of race,
8 color, sex, religion, disability, and national origin,
9 Federal civil rights statutes do not expressly include
10 “sexual orientation” or “gender identity”. As a re-
11 sult, students and parents have often had limited
12 legal recourse to redress for discrimination on the
13 basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

14 (b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are—

15 (1) to ensure that all students have access to
16 public education in a safe environment free from dis-
17 crimination, including harassment, bullying, intimi-
18 dation and violence, on the basis of sexual orienta-
19 tion or gender identity;

20 (2) to provide a comprehensive Federal prohibi-
21 tion of discrimination in public schools based on ac-
22 tual or perceived sexual orientation or gender iden-
23 tity;

24 (3) to provide meaningful and effective rem-
25 edies for discrimination in public schools based on

1 actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender
2 identity;

3 (4) to invoke congressional powers, including
4 but not limited to the power to enforce the 14th
5 Amendment to the Constitution and to provide for
6 the general welfare pursuant to section 8 of article
7 I of the Constitution and the power to enact all laws
8 necessary and proper for the execution of the fore-
9 going powers pursuant to section 8 of article I of the
10 Constitution, in order to prohibit discrimination in
11 public schools on the basis of sexual orientation or
12 gender identity; and

13 (5) to allow the Department of Education to ef-
14 fectively combat discrimination based on sexual ori-
15 entation or gender identity in public schools through
16 regulation and enforcement, as the Department has
17 issued regulations under and enforced title IX of the
18 Education Amendments of 1972 and other non-
19 discrimination laws in a manner that effectively ad-
20 dresses discrimination.

21 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

22 For purposes of this Act:

23 (1) PROGRAM OR ACTIVITY.—The terms “pro-
24 gram or activity” and “program” have same mean-
25 ings given such terms as applied under section 606

1 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d–
2 4a) to the operations of public entities under para-
3 graph (2)(B) of such section.

4 (2) GENDER IDENTITY.—The term “gender
5 identity” means the gender-related identity, appear-
6 ance, or mannerisms or other gender-related charac-
7 teristics of an individual, with or without regard to
8 the individual’s designated sex at birth.

9 (3) HARASSMENT.—The term “harassment”
10 means conduct that is sufficiently severe, persistent,
11 or pervasive to limit a student’s ability to participate
12 in or benefit from a public school education program
13 or activity, or to create a hostile or abusive edu-
14 cational environment at a public school, including
15 acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical aggression, in-
16 timidation, or hostility, if such conduct is based
17 on—

18 (A) a student’s actual or perceived sexual
19 orientation or gender identity; or

20 (B) the actual or perceived sexual orienta-
21 tion or gender identity of a person or persons
22 with whom a student associates or has associ-
23 ated.

24 (4) PUBLIC SCHOOLS.—The term “public
25 schools” means public elementary and secondary

1 schools, including local educational agencies, edu-
 2 cational service agencies, and State educational
 3 agencies, as defined in section 9101 of the Elemen-
 4 tary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

5 (5) SEXUAL ORIENTATION.—The term “sexual
 6 orientation” means homosexuality, heterosexuality,
 7 or bisexuality.

8 (6) STUDENT.—The term “student” means an
 9 individual who is enrolled in a public school or who,
 10 regardless of official enrollment status, attends
 11 classes or participates in a public school’s programs
 12 or educational activities.

13 **SEC. 4. PROHIBITION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION; EXCEP-**
 14 **TIONS.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—No student shall, on the basis of
 16 actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity
 17 of such individual or of a person with whom the student
 18 associates or has associated, be excluded from participa-
 19 tion in, or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to
 20 discrimination under any program or activity receiving
 21 Federal financial assistance.

22 (b) HARASSMENT.—For purposes of this Act, dis-
 23 crimination includes, but is not limited to, harassment of
 24 a student on the basis of actual or perceived sexual ori-

1 entation or gender identity of such student or of a person
2 with whom the student associates or has associated.

3 (c) RETALIATION PROHIBITED.—

4 (1) PROHIBITION.—No person shall be excluded
5 from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or
6 be subjected to discrimination, retaliation, or re-
7 prisal under any program or activity receiving Fed-
8 eral financial assistance based on his or her opposi-
9 tion to conduct made unlawful by this Act.

10 (2) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this sub-
11 section, “opposition to conduct made unlawful by
12 this Act” includes, but is not limited to—

13 (A) opposition to conduct reasonably be-
14 lieved to be made unlawful by this Act,

15 (B) any formal or informal report, whether
16 oral or written, to any governmental entity, in-
17 cluding public schools and employees thereof,
18 regarding conduct made unlawful by this Act or
19 reasonably believed to be made unlawful by this
20 Act,

21 (C) participation in any investigation, pro-
22 ceeding, or hearing related to conduct made un-
23 lawful by this Act or reasonably believed to be
24 made unlawful by this Act, and

1 (D) assistance or encouragement provided
2 to any other person in the exercise or enjoy-
3 ment of any right granted or protected by this
4 Act,
5 if in the course of that expression, the person in-
6 volved does not purposefully provide information
7 known to be false to any public school or other gov-
8 ernmental entity regarding a violation, or alleged
9 violation, of this Act.

10 **SEC. 5. FEDERAL ADMINISTRATIVE ENFORCEMENT; RE-**
11 **PORT TO CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.**

12 Each Federal department and agency which is em-
13 powered to extend Federal financial assistance to any edu-
14 cation program or activity, by way of grant, loan, or con-
15 tract other than a contract of insurance or guaranty, is
16 authorized and directed to effectuate the provisions of sec-
17 tion 4 of this Act with respect to such program or activity
18 by issuing rules, regulations, or orders of general applica-
19 bility which shall be consistent with achievement of the
20 objectives of the Act authorizing the financial assistance
21 in connection with which the action is taken. No such rule,
22 regulation, or order shall become effective unless and until
23 approved by the President. Compliance with any require-
24 ment adopted pursuant to this section may be effected—

1 (1) by the termination of or refusal to grant or
2 to continue assistance under such program or activ-
3 ity to any recipient as to whom there has been an
4 express finding on the record, after opportunity for
5 hearing, of a failure to comply with such require-
6 ment, but such termination or refusal shall be lim-
7 ited to the particular political entity, or part thereof,
8 or other recipient as to whom such a finding has
9 been made, and shall be limited in its effect to the
10 particular program, or part thereof, in which such
11 noncompliance has been so found, or

12 (2) by any other means authorized by law,
13 except that no such action shall be taken until the depart-
14 ment or agency concerned has advised the appropriate per-
15 son or persons of the failure to comply with the require-
16 ment and has determined that compliance cannot be se-
17 cured by voluntary means. In the case of any action termi-
18 nating, or refusing to grant or continue, assistance be-
19 cause of failure to comply with a requirement imposed
20 pursuant to this section, the head of the Federal depart-
21 ment or agency shall file with the committees of the House
22 and Senate having legislative jurisdiction over the pro-
23 gram or activity involved a full written report of the cir-
24 cumstances and the grounds for such action. No such ac-

tion shall become effective until 30 days have elapsed after the filing of such report.

SEC. 6. CAUSE OF ACTION.

(a) CAUSE OF ACTION.—Subject to subsection (c) of this section, an aggrieved individual may assert a violation of this Act in a judicial proceeding. Aggrieved persons may be awarded all appropriate relief, including but not limited to equitable relief, compensatory damages, cost of the action, and remedial action.

(b) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—This section shall not be construed to preclude an aggrieved individual from obtaining other remedies under any other provision of law or to require such individual to exhaust any administrative complaint process or notice-of-claim requirement before seeking redress under this section.

(c) STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS.—For actions brought pursuant to this section, the statute of limitations period shall be determined in accordance with section 1658(a) of title 28 of the United States Code. The tolling of any such limitations period shall be determined in accordance with the law governing actions under section 1979 of the Revised Statutes (42 U.S.C. 1983) in the forum State.

SEC. 7. STATE IMMUNITY.

(a) STATE IMMUNITY.—A State shall not be immune under the 11th Amendment to the Constitution of the

1 United States from suit in Federal court for a violation
2 of this Act.

3 (b) WAIVER.—A State’s receipt or use of Federal fi-
4 nancial assistance for any program or activity of a State
5 shall constitute a waiver of sovereign immunity, under the
6 11th Amendment to the Constitution or otherwise, to a
7 suit brought by an aggrieved individual for a violation of
8 section 4 of this Act.

9 (c) REMEDIES.—In a suit against a State for a viola-
10 tion of this Act, remedies (including remedies both at law
11 and in equity) are available for such a violation to the
12 same extent as such remedies are available for such a vio-
13 lation in the suit against any public or private entity other
14 than a State.

15 **SEC. 8. ATTORNEY’S FEES.**

16 Section 722(b) of the Revised Statutes (42 U.S.C.
17 1988(b)) is amended by inserting “the Student Non-
18 discrimination Act of 2013,” after “Religious Land Use
19 and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000,”.

20 **SEC. 9. EFFECT ON OTHER LAWS.**

21 (a) FEDERAL AND STATE NONDISCRIMINATION
22 LAWS.—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to pre-
23 empt, invalidate, or limit rights, remedies, procedures, or
24 legal standards available to victims of discrimination or
25 retaliation under any other Federal law or law of a State

1 or political subdivision of a State, including title VI of the
2 Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.), title
3 IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C.
4 1681 et seq.), section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of
5 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794), the Americans with Disabilities Act
6 of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.), or section 1979 of the
7 Revised Statutes (42 U.S.C. 1983). The obligations im-
8 posed by this Act are in addition to those imposed by title
9 IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C.
10 1681 et seq.), title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42
11 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.), and the Americans with Disabilities
12 Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.).

13 (b) FREE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION LAWS AND RE-
14 LIGIOUS STUDENT GROUPS.—Nothing in this Act shall be
15 construed to alter legal standards regarding, or affect the
16 rights available to individuals or groups under, other Fed-
17 eral laws that establish protections for freedom of speech
18 and expression, such as legal standards and rights avail-
19 able to religious and other student groups under the 1st
20 Amendment to the Constitution and the Equal Access Act
21 (20 U.S.C. 4071 et seq.).

22 **SEC. 10. SEVERABILITY.**

23 If any provision of this Act, or any application of such
24 provision to any person or circumstance, is held to be un-
25 constitutional, the remainder of this Act, and the applica-

1 tion of the provision to any other person or circumstance
2 shall not be affected.

3 **SEC. 11. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

4 This Act shall take effect 60 days after the date of
5 the enactment of this Act and shall not apply to conduct
6 occurring before the effective date of this Act.

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