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In My View: Bill would help protect gay students

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On April 23, members of the Illinois House and the Senate passed an anti-bullying bill that includes language addressing sexual orientation and gender identity. Gov. Pat Quinn is expected to sign the bill soon. I encourage the governor to sign this bill because there is an abundance of discrimination toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people in schools.

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, carried out the 2007 National School Climate Survey, which revealed that nine out of 10 gay students in middle school and high school have experienced harassment because of their sexual orientation. Three out of five students also felt unsafe going to school because of their sexual orientation.

I experienced discrimination after I came out as gay while I attended high school in District 186. Besides hearing remarks like, "That's so gay," and other similar comments, I overheard students discuss killing gay people. After reporting the incident, I received little support from faculty.

Though comments are hurtful, I received other more serious acts of discrimination including being cornered in the school bathroom and told that I did not belong there. Another gay student had his tires slashed in the student parking lot. The student who carried out this act of discrimination admitted to doing so because the student was gay. He only received one day of in-school suspension.

Evidence shows that it is not only students who discriminate against their gay peers, but also faculty and staff. When I wanted to bring my girlfriend to my junior year homecoming, I was told by the administration that I could only bring her as a friend, which is similar to the recent Mississippi prom case involving Constance McMillen, where the American Civil Liberties Union and the courts determined it was against a person's First Amendment right to deny two people of the same sex that are in a relationship to attend prom or homecoming together.

In addition to passing a law that would cease bullying against gay students, there also should be proper training for the administration and teachers when they are confronted with issues involving gay students. In 2006, the National Education Network released "Strengthening and Learning Environment: A School Employee's Guide to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues." This manual has facts on how to support a gay student, how to prevent suicide, understanding sexual orientation, law and policies, and other useful evidence. I believe something as simple as reading this manual will help administration and teachers obtain the knowledge of how to support gay students.

Discrimination can cause students to feel unsafe, skip school, feel isolated and, in worst-case scenarios, think about committing suicide. Based on my own personal experience and experiences of many other gay students in Illinois, I believe that the governor should sign the anti-bullying bill, which is a positive step toward ending discrimination against Illinois' gay students.

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