

Statement from Schools and Family Groups

At What Cost?

Protecting Our Youth In Our Fight For Marriage Equality

We represent grassroots and advocacy organizations dedicated to promoting the wellbeing and safety of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning (LGBTQ) youth, youth with LGBTQ parents, and LGBTQ parents in California. Over the last several decades, we have worked hard to create safer schools for LGBTQ youth and families, and California today is one of the most welcoming states for our youth and families, with some of the most protective laws in the nation. It is our position that the price of a ballot initiative campaign in 2010 to the health and wellbeing of our youth and families would be too high.

Following the passage of Proposition 8, our organizations have seen a significant increase in discrimination and harassment of LGBTQ youth and children of LGBTQ parents in California schools, requiring legal or other administrative intervention. This harassment has been damaging to youth, impacting their psychosocial and academic success. Moreover, its ongoing negative impact hurts not only LGBTQ youth and children of LGBTQ parents, but overall school safety. Our organizations have also experienced first hand a chilling effect on the safe schools work we do in local communities throughout California: starting even before the election, administrators, school board members, and teachers have been increasingly reluctant to embrace our efforts to provide anti-bias education in schools to make schools more inclusive of LGBTQ youth and families and safer places for them to focus on learning.

Given the Yes on 8 Campaign's focus on the inclusion of LGBTQ issues in schools—as well as the newly heightened awareness and politicization around the state of LGBTQ issues due to the Proposition 8 campaign more generally—it is perhaps unsurprising that our schools have become battlegrounds on these issues. Nonetheless, the Yes on 8 campaign has unquestionably made our work harder, and put many already vulnerable LGBTQ youth and families at even greater risk.

As organizations that work every day to achieve equal rights and equal opportunities for LGBTQ people and families, we are intimately familiar with the harms imposed each day that we live without full marriage equality. And we are acutely aware that the passage of Proposition 8 affected a generation of LGBTQ youth and their peers, who were told that they are not equal. We also believe, however, that another failed campaign will multiply this impact.

As much as we want to repeal Proposition 8, we are deeply concerned about bringing a repeal initiative to the voters before we believe that we can win. And we do not think that such a victory is likely as early as 2010. Any campaign on marriage equality will include the same schools-related rhetoric that we heard from the Yes on 8 Campaign, and we expect that we will see a similar result: increased harassment and bullying of LGBTQ youth and families in our schools, and an even further chilling effect on critical anti-bias safe schools work.

When we do bring a repeal initiative to the voters, we need to make sure we can win. Winning must include effective messaging that defuses our opposition's scare tactics about LGBTQ issues in schools, and that doesn't do any long-term damage to efforts to create safe, inclusive schools for all youth and families. While many groups are working on such messaging, its successful implementation will take time. This is especially true in our current economic climate, where the budget cuts to our schools will inevitably limit their ability to help address discrimination and harassment and where our community's capacity to do safe schools work is also reduced.

We, and the youth we care so dearly about, hold precious the value of winning marriage equality. We feel that the best course of action to achieve this end is not to pursue a ballot initiative campaign to repeal Proposition 8 in 2010, and whenever a campaign is pursued, it is not done at the expense of our youth and families.

Submitted by:

Our Family Coalition
Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network)
Family Equality Council
COLAGE
Pacific Center for Human Growth
Ventura County Rainbow Alliance
Transgender Law Center
GroundSpark / Respect for All Project
San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community Center
National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC)
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) National

- List in formation, as of July 24, 2009 -

(To add your organization's name to this list, please contact Carolyn@gsanetwork.org.)