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AB 1856 – FOSTER YOUTH: LGBT CULTURAL COMPETENCY

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Sponsor: Equality California

IN BRIEF

Assembly Bill 1856 would require that existing training programs for foster youth caregivers include information related to cultural competency and best practices for serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth.

THE ISSUE

LGBT youth are disproportionately targeted for harassment and discrimination in the foster care system. This abuse is perpetrated not only by youth peers, but in some cases by facility staff, foster parents, and other service providers. When the abuse is between peers, the harassment is often condoned by facility staff or goes unaddressed.

Currently foster youth caregivers undergo training regarding foster youth rights and protections as a part of their certification. Although this training includes the right to receive protection against discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, it does not adequately prepare foster youth caregivers with information about issues and needs specific to LGBT youth or provide guidance on the proper measures they must take to ensure a supportive and safe environment.

THE SOLUTION

AB 1856 seeks to build greater understanding between LGBT foster youth and their caregivers by integrating the best practices for providing care to LGBT youth into the existing training curriculum. Integrating LGBT competency and sensitivity training into the current training would help to bring awareness to LGBT issues and protect some of the most vulnerable children in our state's child welfare system.

BACKGROUND

Many LGBT youth are placed in the foster care due to the discrimination and abuse they face in their families of origin and in their schools. While it is impossible to determine the exact number of LGBT youth in the foster care system, recent studies suggest that LGBT youth make up between 5-10% of the total foster youth population. However, the actual percentage may be even higher since many do not report their gender identity or sexual orientations out of concern for their own safety.

In a study of 400 LGBT homeless youth in San Diego, 64% reported that they ran away from at least one

out-of-home placement due to harassment or assault, including sexual assault. A New York joint task force on Child Welfare Administration and Council of Family and Childcare Agencies reported that 70% of the LGBT youth study participants experienced physical violence in foster care and 56% said that they lived on the streets at times because they felt it was safer than living in group or foster homes.

Aside from physical and verbal abuse or harassment, instances of unlawful discrimination against LGBT youth in foster care include confiscating LGBT supportive materials or prohibiting LGBT youth from receiving LGBT supportive services offered through LGBT youth groups or resource centers. There are also many cases of caregivers or service providers refusing to use the youth's requested name or pronoun, prohibiting the youth from wearing clothing consistent with their gender identity, or actively trying to change the youth's sexual orientation or gender identity with "reparative" or "conversion" counseling. Often, staff members choose to isolate the youth from their peers in foster care or transfer them to a new placement if there is harassment or assault rather than resolving the underlying prejudice and providing supportive services.

SUPPORT

Equality California (Sponsor)
Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance
California Communities United Institute
California National Organization for Women
California Youth Connection
Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services
Larkin Street Youth Services
Legal Advocates for Children and Youth
Penny Lane Centers
Public Counsel Law Center
The Village Family Services

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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