



**Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network – Massachusetts Chapter
Nicholas Diaz- Student**

**Testimony Before the Commission to Review Statutes Relative to the
Implementation of the School Bullying Law**

**Re: Hearing to address potential changes to the General Laws and to
review parental responsibility surrounding bullying and cyber-bullying**

February 9, 2011

Chairperson and Members of the Committee, my name is Nicholas Diaz from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN Massachusetts. I am here as a member of GLSEN, but more importantly, as a student of the Boston Public Schools. I am a senior at Brighton High School, and next year I will be attending Centre College as a Posse Scholar. Until recently I believed it would be one of many successes just out of my grasp. I thank you for allowing me the time to speak today. This is a very important issue to me, and it means a great deal that our elected officials are taking notice. I have been working with GLSEN on issues of bullying for two years now, but the issue of parental notification is extremely important to me, and I am here today to ask you for consideration when acting on this important and sensitive issue.

Recently, all of us have seen an increased amount of highly publicized suicides in the country. Bullying is widely understood to be a huge issue among today's students, but when we consider the issues involved in LGBT bullying, we need to be considerate in our responses. As a young teenager, I was ostracized by most of my family for being gay. My mother refused to speak to me about anything GLBT related, and she ignored all the times my brothers bullied me for being gay. School offered even less support. "Are you gay?!" students asked. Others never asked – they just called me 'fag.' It was dehumanizing to be verbally assaulted day after day, as if my pride, my self, were not my

own. Teachers were polite but distant, and no one noticed that I withdrew until I was virtually invisible, other than the taunting. Night after night I would sit alone in my room and pour my heart into poetry because I felt like the paper didn't judge, didn't ask anything of me. The last thing I would have wanted would have been for my school to approach my family with what I was facing. I knew my mother was not accepting of my sexuality, and I she would not have been supportive of the challenges I faced at school. In fact, things would only have become much worse for me. My mother and I operated on a "don't ask, don't tell" policy when it came to my sexuality.

By my junior year I was drained. Being gay in high school is hard. It can be torturous being gay, black, and Latino. So I stayed home, slept the day away, and dropped out.

Fortunately for me, I enrolled in Brighton High School the following year. I hoped to remain anonymous, but when I found a supportive teacher I learned that I could discuss my concerns and still have my privacy respected. At Brighton, I felt more able to be myself. I became a respected student leader, and though I did not face bullying there, I saw the sensitivity with which other students were treated when they were bullied. Their privacy was respected, and the focus was always on the behavior, not their identities. Seeing this made me wish that more communities were understanding, and I began to work with my teacher, Danielle Murray, and GLSEN MA, to help other people and schools learn how to handle these delicate issues. Even though it can still be difficult to discuss at home, through my work, my mother is now at a place where she can begin to understand some of the challenges I have gone through.

Many people do not understand what it is like to be a bullied teen. Many people do not see the daily struggle to live, but I have. So have millions of students in this country. This needs to stop. Students deserve to feel safe in their schools, and if they have an issue with bullying, they need to know that they can ask for help without unintentionally being "outed" to people in their families. Also, it is important to remember that many students are bullied for being perceived to be LGBT, with no confirmation of their actual sexuality. Forcing school officials to inform their parents of this could only cause heartache and hardship to many students who have already been victimized. Students who fear these repercussions are not going to report the bullying

they are experiencing, which will negatively affect the school climate and prevent us from protecting those who need it the most.

So, again, I thank you for your consideration on such an important issue. I urge you to consider two things:

- a. A standard that fails to take into account student safety and well-being will create unintended negative consequences for LGBT students, such as familial rejection and ejection from the home.**

- b. A “shall notify” standard will chill reporting of incidents of bullying and harassment by LGBT students, frustrating the purpose of this bill.**

I appreciate your attention to the sensitivity of protecting all students with this legislation, and for helping to make people safer in their school communities.

Thank you!