



June 11, 2013

**Support Quality Education and Safe Schools for All Students
Vote FOR S. 1094 and AGAINST S.1101**

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
615 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
615 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Alexander:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of 210 national organizations charged with the promotion and protection of the rights of all persons in the United States, we write in support of S.1094, the *Strengthening America's Schools Act of 2013* (SASA), sponsored by Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA). SASA would reauthorize and strengthen the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We urge members of the HELP Committee to vote for S.1094 and against any weakening amendments.

The Leadership Conference believes that high quality public education is a fundamental civil and human right. Chairman Harkin's bill reaffirms and bolsters the federal government's longstanding and critical role in ensuring all children have access to a high quality education. The bill contains important accountability, data collection, and other measures to close achievement gaps, to reduce high school dropout rates, and to improve school climate and student safety. The bill also requires states to enact a uniform statewide accountability system that calls for local and state interventions in schools that fail to meet their performance targets for subgroups of students. Furthermore, S. 1094 requires states to focus their most rigorous interventions in dropout factories where less than 60 percent of students graduate. These provisions are important to all students, but particularly significant for low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners.

The Leadership Conference is also pleased that S.1094 proposes numerous provisions to improve school climate, protect students from bullying and harassment, and provide for pregnant and parenting students. Far too often schools resort to excessive exclusionary discipline practices that remove students from the classroom and disenfranchise them from their own education. Additionally, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students face persistent discrimination, bullying and

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Executive Vice President & COO
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harassment, often to the point of skipping class or dropping out of school altogether. Schools must provide a safe, nurturing environment for all students.

We also strongly urge members to vote no on S. 1101, the *Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2013*, sponsored by Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN). This bill would not require strong accountability and performance targets. Nor would it include the extensive programs and civil rights protections against bullying and harassment in S. 1094. To the contrary, Sen. Alexander's bill would roll back federally-required accountability provisions in both current law and in the waivers.

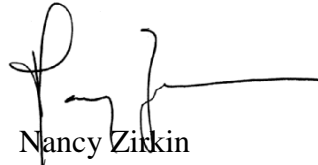
Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with you and members of the committee to improve the achievement and learning conditions of all students.

If you have any questions please contact Dianne Piché, Senior Counsel, at piche@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President