

The Case of SB 48

People who are LGBT have often had a key role in the history of the state. In 1975, for example, a woman tried to shoot President Gerald Ford in San Francisco. A man grabbed her arm and stopped her. His name was Oliver W. "Bill" Sipple. He was a gay man. Newspapers called him a "homosexual hero." But Bill wanted his life to be private.

Sometimes LGBT students today want privacy, too. Other times, they "come out" to their friends and family. Coming out can be risky because of bullying. Below are two bullying stories that changed California law.

In Ventura County, 10-year-old Lawrence King came out as gay. Five years later in 2008, his classmate shot him and killed him at their junior high school. His classmate said King was "too girly."

Seth Walsh was a student in Tehachapi, Calif. In middle school, he came out as gay. He then was a victim of repeated anti-gay bullying. In 2010, Seth committed suicide.

California lawmakers reacted to these tragedies. In 2011, they passed a law called SB 48 (or the "FAIR Education Act"). The law prohibited textbooks from discriminating against LGBT persons and persons with disabilities. It also required schools to teach about the contributions of LGBT persons in the state's history.

The lawmaker who introduced SB 48 said, "We are failing our students when we don't better inform them, and there are tragic consequences."

Activity: The Committee on Civil Rights

You are part of a committee of state lawmakers gathering facts for a new California civil rights law. The law's purpose is to strengthen civil rights in California.

Your committee should:

- a. Read the **The Case of SB 48**.
- b. Discuss the problem in the case study. (What unfairness or discrimination was happening? Why was it a problem?)
- c. Decide what the policy was in each case study. (Remember that policy is the official way of dealing with a problem.)
- d. Recommend what additional policies, if any, might be necessary to achieve equal protection for all under the law. If no recommendation is made, explain why not.
- e. Be prepared to report your recommendations and reasons for them.