



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 27, 2011

Opposition Groups Seek Referendum on Calif. Gay History Law

Since California passed its controversial law requiring public schools to include a social studies curriculum that included the contributions of gays and lesbians, opponents have organized in an attempt to overturn the law. On Tuesday, those opponents moved one step closer to their goal when California's Secretary of State cleared them to begin collecting signatures for a ballot referendum.

The law adds gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, as well as those with disabilities, to a list of groups that schools must include in the lessons, and prohibits the inclusion of any material which may present homosexuality negatively. It leaves up to local school districts to decide what to include in the lessons and in what grade students would receive them.



The controversial law was proposed by Democratic Senator Mark Leno, who dismissed critics' claims that the bill pushed a sexual agenda, asserting that it was "beneficial to share with students the broad diversity of the human experience."

The measure, SB 48, was [signed](#) into law by Governor Jerry Brown earlier this month, but is not set to take effect until the 2013-14 school year. The bill first passed the California Senate by a 23-14 vote before it moved to the Assembly for a 49-25 vote.

As Brown signed the Gay History Law, he said it "revises existing laws that prohibit discrimination in education and ensures that the important contributions of Americans from all backgrounds and walks of life are included in our history books."

Supporters of the measure claimed it would promote tolerance among students and possibly help to prevent the bullying of gay students. They also contend that it is necessary to teach about the historical contributions of people who are gay, bisexual, lesbian, and transgender.

"It's important for us right now to educate Californians about what the bill does and does not do," said Rebekah Orr, a spokeswoman for Equality California, a leading LGBT rights advocacy group in California. "We want to be clear that this bill is about teaching historical figures and not just LGBT people."

Randy Thomasson, president of SaveCalifornia.com, saw it otherwise: "This sexual brainwashing would mandate that children as young as 6 years old be told falsehoods — that homosexuality is biological, when it isn't, or healthy, when it's not."



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Republican Assemblyman Tim Donnelly said that he believed the bill pushed a “homosexual agenda” in public schools, adding:

I think it’s one thing to say that we should be tolerant. It is something else altogether to say that my children are going to be taught that this lifestyle is good. Our founding fathers are turning over in their graves.

The blog Californiality said that Donnelly labelled the legislation censorship:

“[It will] force schools to always present homosexuals as heroic role models. It’s a sad day for our republic when we have the government essentially telling people what they should think,” he declared.

Given the controversy surrounding the bill, opposition organized quickly. *The Blaze* [reports](#):

It took opponents less than two weeks to draft the referendum challenging the move. At a time of budget cuts, California schools should be focused on improving student performance and lowering the high school dropout rate, said Paulo Sibaja, a spokesman for the group Stop SB 48.

“Politicians have no business writing textbooks. It should be left to the historians and academic experts,” she said.

Supporters of the referendum must acquire 504,760 signatures from registered California voters before October 12 in order to make it on the next statewide ballot. The group is so committed to meeting this requirement that it is using paid as well as volunteer signature-gatherers.

Orr contends that Equality California and its partners will fight the referendum if it makes its way to the ballot.

A number of groups, including churches and conservative groups, have voiced concerns with the measure. They contend that the law would teach children to accept homosexuality, and remove the parents from such an important discussion by exposing students to a subject that parents may find disagreeable.

Californiality [writes](#) of one of the opposition groups:

California’s Traditional Values Coalition insisted that state schools should concentrate on improving the reading, writing and math of California students, declaring, “We have failed at our core educational mission, and yet we are now going to inject gay studies into the classrooms. It’s absurd and offensive.”

Thus far, the bill’s author has not issued a statement on the referendum efforts, as he is out of town for the Legislature’s summer recess.

Photo: Willow Elementary School in Glendora, California



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