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January 11, 2011

Halton Catholic District School Board
Catholic Education Centre
802 Drury Lane
Burlington, ON L7R 2Y2

Via Fax: 905-333-4661

Dear Members of the Halton Catholic District School Board,

I am writing to voice the CAW's concern with the Halton Catholic District School Board's recent ban on the formation of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools. While these schools are under the jurisdiction of the HCDSB, they are funded by the Ontario government.

The CAW represents workers from every major sector of the economy with many of these families living in the Halton area, with some of their children attending HCDSB schools.

The Ontario government policy widely recognizes the importance of GSAs in building bridges and understanding for all students who take part in these groups. It further recognizes that GSAs are thought to be one of the best mechanisms to reducing and combating the dreadful effects of homophobia and transphobia.

It is a sign of progress that the HCDSB has implemented an Equity and Inclusive Education policy, but we find it troubling that the Ministry proposed guidelines encouraging GSAs are not permitted in your school system and not included in your policy.

The formations of Gay Straight Alliances are necessary to promote safe and respectful learning for all students in high school. The understanding and teachings of diversity of family and community is essential to creating caring and accepting schools for all students and families, as well as building ties with a larger diverse community where you reside.

These actions will further isolate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer students and students of same gender families. LGBTQ youth who routinely hear homophobic or transphobic comments need a safe place to turn. Research has shown that LGBTQ students who are feeling isolated and bullied are three to four times more likely to attempt suicide, have increased rates of depression, higher rates of being victims of discrimination and violence and higher school drop out rates.

Page 2...

These health risks are not due to sexuality or gender identity expression but rather the negative effects of homophobia and transphobia that student's experience. LGBTQ youth bullying is at crisis levels and you have the power to provide safe space and education to the students and families you serve. It is essential that schools be safe places that encourage learning and understanding, not intimidation and disrespect.

We urge you to reverse this discriminatory ban immediately. We look forward to prompt action on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Lewenza". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Ken Lewenza
National President
CAW-Canada**

SD/KL/jwcope343

cc: NEB, Assistant to the President Peggy Nash; National Representative Ken Stuart, CAW Local 707 Human Rights Committee Billy O'Neill