



# Rainbow Cafe LGBTQ Center

Southern Illinois' safe space for LGBTQIA+ folks and allies

## Know Your Rights

*An expanded guide to YOUR rights as an LGBTQIA+ student*

*\*The following sections refer to your legal rights and protections within PUBLIC schools. If you attend private school, please visit XX.*

### Expression

Going to school does NOT mean you lose your right to free expression, which is protected under the [First Amendment](#). Every student has a constitutional right to discuss political and social issues from all perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

### Right to Identify

You have the right to speak words relating to your identity and gender and have the right to openly refer to yourself as “queer,” “transgender,” “nonbinary,” etc. There is nothing “sexual” about discussing inclusion and respect, nor is there anything “sexual” about opposing harassment, discrimination, and violence. In 2008 and 2009, three federal courts flatly rejected claims that LGBTQIA+-supportive student expression could be restricted as “inappropriately sexual,” or that it interfered with even abstinence-only curriculum.<sup>2</sup>



Since you have the right to freely express yourself within these conditions, schools are also never allowed to require LGBTQIA+ students or GSAs to “tone themselves down.”<sup>3</sup> This means your school can not pressure your GSA to rename themselves something “more appropriate” like the Diversity Club or Tolerance Club. No matter how “controversial” having a GSA may be, you have the general right to protest and assemble, even on school grounds, as proven by [Tinker v. Des Moines](#) in 1969.<sup>4</sup>

### Right to Equal Policies

ALL public school policies must be equal, and not target LGBTQIA+ identities under the [Equal Access Act \(EAA\)](#).<sup>5</sup> While your school may enforce a dress code, they can NOT

force gender expression under that code. Or, while a school may have two dress code options for male and female students, they are not allowed to force you into wearing one or the other. This is because you are protected by both the First Amendment right to free expression and [Title IX](#).<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, if your school generally allows written messages on T-shirts but targeted shirts supporting LGBTQIA+ equality, that violates your rights too. In 2012, the US District Courts ruled that for a student's right to wear a shirt with the message "Jesus is not a homophobe" in [Couch v. Wayne Local School District](#).<sup>7</sup>



Maverick Couch wearing the shirt "Jesus is not a homophobe"

If your school allows any non-curriculum club (ex. Chess Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes), they MUST allow GSAs. This is protected under the EAA because schools that receive federal funding and allow meetings of other non-curricular student clubs are prohibited from discriminating against any student group based on its viewpoint and the First Amendment right to associate.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, your school must enforce the same policies on GSAs as other clubs - they must not require additional parental permission, require extra paperwork, etc. under the EAA.<sup>5</sup>

While a school does have the power to decide whether it will allow student announcements on a public address system or allow posters on school grounds, it must apply those rules evenhandedly without discrimination based on the ideas students want to express. If the basketball team is allowed to use the intercom to announce try-outs, your GSA is allowed to announce meetings.<sup>5</sup>

## Censorship

Schools MAY censor free speech under the following conditions: the speech is verbally abusive or harassment; it promotes illegal drug use or is lewd or profane; or it will cause actual, substantial disruption to the school's operation, which must be proven factually by school officials. Schools may not simply assume expression will be disruptive, nor can they label speech disruptive because it is controversial, inconvenient, or uncomfortable, or that others may respond to that speech in a disruptive way.<sup>4</sup> LGBTQIA+ rights may be controversial in your school, but that does not make them disruptive. It is further illegal to deny GSAs permission to form because they are too controversial



- again, courts have ruled that controversy is an insufficient excuse to deny a GSA access to the same privileges granted to other clubs.<sup>8</sup>

This is further backed by the 2013 case *Hatcher v. DeSoto County Board of Education* when a student was censored and punished for trying to organize a school-wide observation of “[Day of Silence](#),” a national student-led day of action that highlights anti-LGBTQIA+ bullying in schools.<sup>9</sup> The well-settled legal precedent supports students’ free speech via the First Amendment.<sup>3</sup>

Further, if other students harass another student because of their pro-LGBTQIA+ support, the school MUST take disciplinary action against the harassers, as supported in the case *Nabozny v. Podlesny*,<sup>10</sup> *Flores v. Morgan Hill Unified School District*,<sup>11</sup> and *Romer v. Evans*.<sup>12</sup> It may not “solve” the problem by pressuring the victim to change. As one federal court explained in the context of queer-supportive speech, the First Amendment “does not tolerate mob rule by unruly school children.”<sup>13</sup> Students do NOT have a constitutional right to harass others, and as one federal appeals court explains, “There is no constitutional right to be a bully.”<sup>14</sup> Others’ complaints or protests against the existence of a GSA does not deem the GSA as disruptive, either - the law says there is no “heckler’s veto” over someone else’s speech.<sup>15</sup>

## **Bullying, Harassment, & Discrimination**

In accordance with the Prevent School Violence Act of Illinois, or [PA 96-0952](#), all teachers, faculty, and other school staff are REQUIRED to intervene when witnessing bullying, harassment, and other forms of discrimination.<sup>16</sup> This Act protects all Illinois public students from being harassed based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. These policies also apply to all LGBTQIA+ allies and students simply perceived as LGBTQIA+, even if they are not. If you are being targeted because you are queer, transgender, or fall anywhere else on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, you have the right to report bullying and harassment under the Prevent School Violence Act AND your school is required to address it.<sup>17</sup> Further, [PA 98-669](#)<sup>18</sup> enforces all public Illinois schools to do their due diligence to prevent all forms of harassment, and [PA 98-801](#) mandates schools to prevent and intervene in similar cyber-bullying.<sup>19</sup>

Other students should never say homophobic, transphobic, or threatening things, especially to or in front of LGBTQIA+ students. Additionally, teachers and staff should never say homophobic, transphobic, or threatening things either, especially in the classroom. Despite this being a well-covered legal right, many LGBTQIA+ students in Illinois do not have access to resources and support - only 14% of Illinois schools have comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>20</sup>

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 also protects you on a federal level - Title IX explicitly bans all discrimination based on sex in public schools. Courts have further agreed that Title IX further includes banning discrimination and harassment against those that fail to conform to gender stereotypes, which LGBTQIA+ youth often fall under.<sup>6</sup>

It is also important to note that intentionally or purposely misgendering transgender students is harassment<sup>21</sup> - as detailed in the below section regarding Names and Pronouns, schools have a responsibility to use students' chosen names and pronouns. Under Title IX and the Prevent School Violence Act, teachers are required to intervene when witnessing other students misgender transgender students, and should NEVER misgender students themselves.

## Names, Pronouns, & Documentation

### Right to Affirmation

Schools must maintain a mandatory permanent student record of your legal name and legal gender, but schools ARE allowed to use any name or information on other school documents outside of that permanent record, such as for IDs, rosters, email addresses, etc.<sup>22</sup> While you do need a legal notice or court order to alter your permanent record, all Illinois schools must use the affirmed identity of their transgender students for everything else.

The Illinois State Board of Education system does not use parental consent to change things such as a student's name or gender marker, and therefore all schools that use ISBE systems should never require parental consent for such changes. However, some schools use

administrative systems other than ISBE, which may require parental sign-off for name and gender marker changes. Each school district has its own rules, so you should look into your district's policies either by visiting your school's website or requesting it in person.<sup>17</sup>

Even if you cannot change your name and pronouns in the school system, your school MUST address you by your affirmed identity. A school refusing to do is violating your rights to confidentiality and safety since intentionally not using your affirmed name and pronouns can be considered "outing" and bullying.<sup>23</sup>



All schools **MUST allow you to change your name on school rosters, regardless of other administrative systems.** However, many roster systems are old, and may have trouble doing this smoothly - that being said, it is still the school's responsibility to support you as a student. **A task being difficult or complicated does not warrant denying you.**<sup>17</sup>

### Responsibility to Complications

Additionally, it is worth noting that having your affirmed name and gender marker can often complicate state and legal documents. Nearly all standardized tests and forms being sent to college will have complications. But those **complications do not outweigh your right to be affirmed, and it is your school's responsibility to guide you through those complicated processes.**<sup>17</sup>

### Bathrooms & Locker Rooms

While this section focuses on transgender students' right to access bathrooms and locker rooms, nonbinary students also have complete protection under these policies and cases, too. Since nonbinary is a gender identity, the Illinois Human Rights Act also protects your rights just as any cisgender or transgender student's rights.

### Right to Equal Spaces

Many transgender students believe separate bathrooms and locker rooms draw attention to them, putting them at risk for additional bullying and harassment. Illinois public schools cannot force you to use separate places if you do not want to. **While it's great for schools to have gender-neutral options, they should never force transgender and nonbinary students into using them. Doing so would intentionally remove your right to equal access to the same facilities as everyone else.**<sup>5</sup>

The [Illinois Human Rights Act](#)<sup>24</sup> and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 protect the rights of transgender students to use restrooms and locker rooms of their identified gender on both a state and federal level. Further, the 2017 case [Whitaker v.](#)



Ashton Whitaker and his mother

[Kenosha Unified School District](#) illustrates court backing of transgender-inclusive access to restrooms and locker rooms.<sup>25</sup> Forcing transgender students to use restrooms that do *not* align with their gender identity intentionally puts them at increased risk for verbal and physical harassment, as well as detrimental for their mental health. Pressuring students to alternatively “hold it in” puts students at elevated health risks. A startlingly 52% of transgender Illinois students report being unable to use their



affirmed school bathroom, and access to restrooms and locker rooms is currently the highest reported LGBTQIA+ student discrimination in the state.<sup>20</sup>

Your right to use gendered restrooms and/or locker rooms does not need to be “proven.” Your school cannot require legal or medical proof that you are transgender to use certain facilities, and this has been backed by both Illinois state and federal courts.<sup>17</sup>

### Right to Safety

On the other hand, you may prefer to use a locker room or restroom separate from other students. Even if your school does not have a gender-neutral bathroom readily available, they must protect you. Talk to a guidance counselor or administrator to see what action plan best fits your needs - many schools have single-use nurse’s offices or other likewise facilities. A school’s responsibility to provide such facilities is *not* due to LGBTQIA+ policies in particular - all students should have access to private facilities should they ask.<sup>17</sup>



In the event you and your school agree that a gender-neutral restroom is best, that restroom or locker room must be equal to cisgender students’ facilities, per the EAA. Gender-neutral bathrooms should not be inaccessible, dangerous, or completely out of the way. Further, you should never be punished or disciplined for accessing them.<sup>5</sup> It is all too common for transgender and nonbinary students to have to walk an additional 10 minutes to the only gender-neutral restroom on campus, only to be given detention when returning to class because of the travel time getting there and back - this is not okay nor acceptable, since your school has the responsibility to equal facilities.

### Athletics

No matter what, you CAN participate on school sports teams consistent with your gender identity. The process for doing so may be tedious since you will have to get approved by the IHSA or the IESA. Please visit XX for more information regarding this process.

Similarly, you have the right to participate in non-competitive sports and PE classes that match your gender identity without getting processed approval. Your right to identity does not need to be proven in this context, and schools should accommodate and affirm your identity without asking for medical proof of transition.<sup>17</sup>

## Dances and School-Sponsored Events

It's your senior prom and you've been waiting all year to have a magical night with your partner. You buy tickets, get dressed up, and drive together to the school gymnasium - but you get stopped at the door. You've done all the things but get told off that queer couples aren't allowed. This story is all too common for LGBTQIA+ students - but you have the right to a special night, just like your cisgender and heterosexual peers. Despite how proven this right is, 6% of LGBTQIA+ students in Illinois are still being denied.<sup>20</sup>

### Right to Equal Policies

Federal courts have upheld your right to bring a same-sex partner to school-sponsored events like prom, homecoming, and more since 1980's *Fricke v. Lynch* when Aaron Fricke wanted to take his boyfriend to prom.<sup>26</sup>



Fricke and Guillbert at prom

The Supreme Court has ruled that both policies and actions that block or discriminate against LGBTQIA+ couples violate your right to free expression and association - which are guaranteed by the First Amendment. This was also more recently affirmed by the 2008 federal decision against Scottsboro, Alabama when two girls defeated their school board's efforts to block them.<sup>27</sup>

LGBTQIA+ couples should never be required extra permission to attend school events. While it may bring you peace of mind to tell your school administration ahead of time, you should never be forced to. Further, you should never be forced to go extra steps compared to cisgender or straight students - if your school tells you that you need your parents' permission to attend an event, then all students must get parental permission. LGBTQIA+ students should never be singled out.<sup>5</sup>

### Right to Safety

Your school MUST respect your participation and provide for your safety - the *Fricke v. Lynch* case also established that homophobia from other students, faculty, or community members does not warrant banning LGBTQIA+ participation within school functions. Rather, it is vital that schools perform their duty in protecting you as you exercise your right to participate.<sup>26</sup> You should NEVER experience harassment, bullying, or discrimination, and it is your school's responsibility to make you feel safe.

## Right to Affection

Your school may have limits on public displays of affection both during classroom hours and during school-sponsored events, but those standards must be applied to every student equally. LGBTQIA+ students and couples should never be targeted, and all policies like this must be also applied to your cisgender and heterosexual classmates.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, 24% of LGBTQIA+ Illinois students experience discipline for PDA not similar to their non-LGBTQIA+ peers.<sup>20</sup> The expression of sexual orientation and gender identity both fall under your First Amendment rights, and the right to equal policies is protected under the EAA.<sup>5</sup>

## Right to Dress and Express

When it comes to school-sponsored events like prom, schools can set *general* dress standards, like requiring formal attire. However, all students should have the right to wear whatever they like under those restrictions - whether it be a tuxedo, dress, or something else entirely. Not allowing students to do so violates Title IX's protection against gender stereotypes and may violate Illinois protections of transgender and nonbinary students.<sup>28</sup>

It should be noted that some courts have found a school's concern about safety or disruption to be valid, and upheld sex-specific dress codes. However, it is still worth fighting since it subjects the school to legal liability - which can be seen in the 2011 case [\*Logan v. Gary Community School Corporation\*](#).<sup>29</sup>

Schools are also not allowed to prohibit you from running for roles like prom king or homecoming court because it doesn't fit traditional gender roles, particularly because of Title IX. Doing so discriminate based on one's inability to conform to gender stereotypes from one's birth-assigned sex.<sup>6</sup>



K.K. Logan at their prom

## Confidentiality

Your confidentiality regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are all protected under the [\*Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)\*](#)<sup>30</sup> and the [\*Illinois Students Records Act\*](#).<sup>31</sup> Things such as your sexual orientation and gender identity are both personal and private and therefore fall under these protections.



YOU are solely in charge of how “out” you are. Your teachers cannot share information about your sexual orientation or gender identity with people you do not want them to. Your school should fully respect whatever level of confidentiality you request. This includes your parents and other immediate family members, to an extent - teachers are not allowed to out you without a strong justification. On the other hand, you also fully have the right to be as out and proud at school as you want, and should never fear bullying or discrimination, because of your right to expression.<sup>32</sup>

However, your parents do have the right to access your school records until you graduate high school. This is important to keep in mind if you are not out to your parents yet - you can always request a copy of your school record.<sup>17</sup>

## **Information**

All Illinois public school students have the right to learn about LGBTQIA+ figures and history, and all Illinois public schools have the responsibility to include such information in classes via the [Inclusive Curriculum Law](#), or HB 0246, which was signed into law in 2019. Illinois schools must include the roles and contributions of LGBTQIA+

people in the United States and ensure current textbooks and teaching materials reflect correct information.<sup>33</sup>



Illinois also prohibits “No Promo Homo” policies or the intentional restriction of discussing LGBTQIA+ identities and history in public schools.

This extends largely into sex education - if your school teaches sex ed, it must include LGBTQIA+ issues via the

[Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act \(or SB 818\)](#), which was signed in 2021 and mandates all Illinois schools to teach inclusive and medically-accurate sex education.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these state mandates, only 1 in 4 Illinois students are taught HB 0246-compliant representations of LGBTQIA+ people and history, and only 10% of students receive LGBTQ-inclusive sex education.<sup>20</sup>

## **Right to Access**

Nearly all schools use internet filtering software on school computers to prevent students from accessing certain websites that have been deemed inappropriate for youth. Unfortunately, this software occasionally blocks access to sites that provide valuable information and resources for LGBTQIA+ youth. While your first step after

finding a blockage should be to see if it was a software error, some schools intentionally block LGBTQIA+ supportive sites.

Under the EAA, students have the right to equally access valuable resources and information - websites such as [www.rainbowcafe.org](http://www.rainbowcafe.org), [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org), [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org), and [www.campuspride.org](http://www.campuspride.org) being pro-LGBTQIA+ do not make them inappropriate for young people.<sup>5</sup>

## Right to Report

Reporting harassment is a daunting task and can take a substantial amount of time. However, reporting and taking notes is the most effective way to make large-scale changes, especially when combating discrimination, since it gives organizations like Equality Illinois and the Safe School Alliance evidence to file to courts. Remember you have the right to report harassment and discrimination, and that doing so helps ensure your school upholds its responsibility to protect you.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Constitution. amend. I.

<sup>2</sup> Lambda Legal. 2008. "Out, Safe & Respected: Respecting Student Speech and Expression."

[https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/osr-admin\\_respecting-student-speech-and-expression.pdf](https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/osr-admin_respecting-student-speech-and-expression.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Lambda Legal. 2019. "National Day of Silence: The Freedom to Speak (or Not)."

[https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/2019\\_day\\_of\\_silence\\_faq.pdf](https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/2019_day_of_silence_faq.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> John F. Tinker and Mary Beth Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District. 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Equal Access Act. 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Education Amendments of 1972. title ix. 1972.

<sup>7</sup> Couch v. Wayne Local School District. 2012.

<sup>8</sup> "Gay-Straight Alliances: Know Your Rights." Lambda Legal. Accessed January 29, 2022.

<https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-gay-straight-alliances>.

<sup>9</sup> Hatcher v. DeSoto County Board of Education, et al. 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Nabozny v. Podlesny. 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Flores v. Morgan Hill Unified School District. 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Romer v. Evans. 1996.

<sup>13</sup> "Limitations on Students' Free Speech." Lambda Legal. Accessed January 29, 2022.

<https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-limitations-on-free-speech>.

- <sup>14</sup> “Anti-Gay and Anti-Equality Speech.” Lambda Legal. Accessed January 29, 2022.  
<https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-antigay-and-antiequality-speech>.
- <sup>15</sup> Lambda Legal. 2008. “Out, Safe & Respected: Guide to LGBTQ Youth in Schools for Educators and Parents.”  
[https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/osr-admin\\_o\\_ut-safe-respected-for-administrators\\_o.pdf](https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/osr-admin_o_ut-safe-respected-for-administrators_o.pdf)
- <sup>16</sup> Prevent School Violence Act. Pub. Act 096-0952. 2010.
- <sup>17</sup> Illinois Safe Schools Alliance. “Know Your Rights! LGBTQ+ Rights in School.”
- <sup>18</sup> Prevent School Violence Act. Pub. Act 098-0669. 2014.
- <sup>19</sup> Prevent School Violence Act. Pub. Act 098-0801. 2015.
- <sup>20</sup> GLSEN. “State Snapshot: School Climate for LGBTQ Students in Illinois.” 2019.  
<https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Illinois-Snapshot-2019.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> “Know Your Rights: Students & LGBTQ Rights at School.” Southern Poverty Law Center. Accessed January 29, 2022.  
<https://www.splcenter.org/know-your-rights-students-lgbtq-rights-school>
- <sup>22</sup> GLSEN. “Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students: Model Language, Commentary & Resources.” 2014.  
[https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Trans\\_ModelPolicy\\_2014.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Trans_ModelPolicy_2014.pdf)
- <sup>23</sup> Illinois State Board of Education. “Supporting Transgender, Nonbinary and Gender Nonconforming Students.” 2020.  
<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ISBE-Guidance-Supporting-Transgender-Nonbinary-Gender-Nonconforming-Students.pdf>
- <sup>24</sup> Illinois Human Rights Act. 775 ILCS 5. 2006.
- <sup>25</sup> Whitaker v. Kenosha Unified School District. 2017.
- <sup>26</sup> Fricke v. Lynch. 1980.
- <sup>27</sup> “Same-Sex Dates at School Dances.” Lambda Legal. Accessed January 29, 2022.  
<https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-student-safety>.
- <sup>28</sup> “Dress Codes.” Lambda Legal. Accessed January 29, 2022.  
<https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-dress-codes>.
- <sup>29</sup> Logan v. Gary Community School Corporation. 2011.
- <sup>30</sup> Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. 1974.
- <sup>31</sup> Illinois School Student Records Act. 105 ILCS 10. 2014.
- <sup>32</sup> Lambda Legal. “Out, Safe & Respected: Your rights at school.” 2008.  
[https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/osr\\_out-safe-respected\\_o.pdf](https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/osr_out-safe-respected_o.pdf)
- <sup>33</sup> Inclusive Curriculum Law. HB 0246. 2019.
- <sup>34</sup> Keeping Youth Safe and Health Act. SB 818. 2020.

### **Rainbow Cafe LGBTQ Center**

1320 South Giant City Road, Suite F, Carbondale, IL 62902  
info@rainbowcafe.org

Phone: (815) 408-6963  
www.rainbowcafe.org

## Reporting and Protecting Yourself

In the circumstance you or someone you know is experiencing discrimination, please follow the below guide for reporting.

While making reports and complaints can feel challenging and useless, it is the best, proven way to make real change since it provides us with the information and evidence needed to build a court case if needed.

### Writing a Letter

The best first step is to write a letter - it's informal and lets you gather all of your thoughts! You're essentially taking notes, so this doesn't have to be a legal process.

● *Things to include in your letter! :)*

- 1. The names of those you're reporting*
- 2. The dates & times of events*
- 3. Bystanders - or anyone who also saw what happened*
- 4. What happened, with as much detail as possible*
- 5. How this made you feel*
- 6. Any problems this is causing you*  
*"I can't focus in class"*  
*"Other students have started picking on me"*
- 7. What you want to happen next*  
*"I want them to apologize to me"*  
*"I want them to get training on LGBTQIA+ issues"*  
*"I want all detentions this person gave me taken off my permanent record"*  
*"I don't want them to interact with me anymore"*  
*"I want them suspended"*

●

*\*Tip! Keep as many copies of your letter as possible, and try to make an electronic version too!*

### *An Example Letter*

*On Monday, March 8th 202X, Mrs. Jones used the wrong name and pronouns for me during my first hour English I class. I talked with my friends Isabel and Dylan, who were in class with me, and they said I should write this letter.*

*It really upset me - all of the other students looked at me when she did that, and now a few of them have been putting mean notes in my locker, calling me a "tr-nny." My grade in English I is beginning to drop but I'm too scared to ask Mrs. Jones for help.*

*I think I would like Mrs. Jones to get training on transgender issues - I doubt I'll be the last trans student she gets, and I really don't want them to experience this too! I also really want to change classes to have Mr. Smith's English class instead.*

*Kate Rogers*

*March 10th, 202X*

*Keep in mind that your school may not have to legally follow your request, but it never hurts to ask!*

*Writing letters will help you keep all of the info straight. Unfortunately, you will likely have to retell your story and over before it gets resolved. This way, you won't forget as time passes.*

If your administration or principal doesn't do anything, you should also try reporting to your superintendent and school board. Plus, your school district most likely has complaint managers who take anonymous complaints. Ask for a copy of their complaint procedures!





If your parent, guardian, or caregiver is supportive, you can also ask them for help by going to meetings with your school administrations or writing additional letters themselves.

## Getting Legal Help

Sometimes writing a letter isn't enough - that's why we're here for you! The organizations listed below all provide resources or legal help for LGBTQIA+ students like you!

➤ [ACLU of Illinois](#)

312-201-9740

[Online Request for Legal Assistance](#)

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Illinois has been protecting people's rights since 1926 and is staunchly LGBTQ-friendly. They have offices around the country and regularly represent people in court to protect the freedom, liberty, equality, and justice of LGBTQIA+ folks.

➤ [Equality Illinois](#)

773-477-7173

[info@eqil.org](mailto:info@eqil.org) or [mziri@eqil.org](mailto:mziri@eqil.org)

Equality Illinois (EI) was founded in 1991, originally as the Illinois Federation for Human Rights, and actively protects and defends the civil rights of LGBTQIA+ Illinoisians. EI is very legislative-based and works for better policies and laws for all LGBTQIA+ Illinoisians.

➤ [GLSEN](#)

202-621-5815

[aaron.ridings@glSEN.org](mailto:aaron.ridings@glSEN.org)

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has been protecting LGBTQIA+ students since 1990 by creating affirming and safe learning environments in K-12 schools.

➤ [Illinois Safe School Alliance](#)

312-629-2988

[Advocacy Assistance Request Form](#)

The Illinois Safe School Alliance is a program of the Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago (PHIMC) that has been working to create LGBTQIA+ safe schools since 2007. They are very youth advocacy-based and work to ensure young people's



voices are heard.

➤ [Lambda Legal](#)

312-663-4413 for the Midwest Regional Help Desk  
[Online Request for Legal Assistance](#)

Lambda Legal, or the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, is an American civil rights organization founded in 1973 that fights for LGBTQIA+ communities. They are the oldest and largest national legal nonprofit that solely works for the rights of LGBTQIA+ folks by representing cases and advocating for public policy.

➤ [PFLAG](#)

202-467-8180 ext. 221  
[dsanchez@pflag.org](mailto:dsanchez@pflag.org)

PFLAG, formerly known as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, was founded in 1973 and is the nation's largest family and ally organization. PFLAG supports and fights for LGBTQIA+ families across the country.

➤ [Rainbow Cafe](#)

815-408-6963  
[info@rainbowcafe.org](mailto:info@rainbowcafe.org)

Rainbow Cafe (RC) has served the LGBTQIA+ community in Southern Illinois since 2000, primarily as a safe space and resource center. RC actively supports all queer people across Southern Illinois and fights for civil rights through initiatives like the Social Action for Southern Illinois (SASI) committee while fostering safe, supportive communities.



## **Further Reading**

[ACLU: Know Your Rights for LGBTQ Students](#)

[GLAD Legal Advocates & Defenders: Know Your Rights](#)

[GLSEN: LGBTQ Student Rights](#)

[GSAFE: Federal Laws Protecting LGBTQ Students](#)

[Illinois State Bar Association: LGBTQ Rights](#)

[Illinois State Board of Education: Guidance on Supporting Trans Students](#)

[Lambda Legal: Know Your Rights](#)

[Know Your IX: LGBTQ Protections under Title IX](#)

[My School, My Rights: LGBTQ Student Rights](#)

[National Center for Transgender Equality: Know Your Rights](#)

[PFLAG: FAQ on Title IX for Transgender Students](#)









[Southern Poverty Law Center: Know Your Rights: Students & LGBTQ Rights at School](#)

[The Illinois Safe Schools Alliance: Know Your Rights! \(Comic\)](#)

[US Department of Education: Resources for LGBTQ Students](#)

[US Department of Justice: Educational Discrimination](#)

## Quick Factsheet

- ✓ *Right to openly call yourself LGBTQIA+ *
- ✓ *Right to be treated the same as your non-LGBTQIA+ peers *
- ✓ *Right to organize, protest, and express yourself *
- ✓ *Right to be safe and protected from bullying, discrimination, and harassment *
- ✓ *Right to be affirmed and addressed as you identify *
- ✓ *Right to affection *
- ✓ *Right to being out or not *
- ✓ *Right to information *

### **Rainbow Cafe LGBTQ Center**

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