



February 4, 2019

The Honorable Senator Drew Perkins, Senate President

RE: Senator Lynn Hutchings
Central High School Students attending GSA Civics Day on Friday, February 1, 2019

Dear President Perkins,

On Friday, February 1st, Wyoming Equality, the state's only statewide LGBTQ civil rights organization, hosted its bi-annual Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Civics Day where students from GSA clubs across Wyoming are invited to learn about state government and civic engagement. GSAs are clubs dedicated to providing a safe, supportive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and straight ally students. On GSA Civics Day, GSA students spent their day at the Wyoming Supreme Court and Wyoming State Legislature to meet with judges, legislators, legislative staff, lobbyists, community organization representatives, and other elected officials.

At approximately 2pm, 10 students from Central High School were accompanied by their club sponsor and high school teacher to send in notes to Senators in the Senate Chamber. The Central High School students sent in a note to their district representative, Senator Lynn Hutchings. They wished to speak with her regarding HB 230, Enhancing Quality Employment Law, and convey their support of the bill.

Senator Hutchings, upon receiving the note, came out to the gallery to meet with the students. When the Senator arrived, the students introduced themselves and spoke about HB230. Senator Hutchings said she was unfamiliar with the bill's language so the students shared that they wanted her support because the bill would protect the students from workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

In response, Senator Hutchings said the following:

"If my sexual orientation was to have sex with all of the men in there and I had sex with all of the women in there and then they brought their children and I had sex with all of them and then brought their dogs in and I had sex with them, should I be protected for my sexual orientation?"

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Wyoming Equality is the state's only statewide LGBTQ civil rights organization since 1985

At which point, the students sought to clarify the bill's intent only to be rebuffed by Senator Hutchings repeated interruptions. As the conversation came to a close, Senator Hutchings then motioned to fist bump the students and embraced one of them. The students and teacher quickly removed themselves from the Jonah Business Center to process this interaction and provide a supportive space for one another. After some time, they composed themselves and re-entered the Business Center to continue talking to other legislators and Wyoming Equality board and staff were made aware of the incident.

It is our understanding that while the state legislature's anti-harassment policy mentions no protected classes, including sexual orientation and gender identity, Senator Hutchings behavior was unacceptable and inexcusable. Fourteen- and fifteen-year old high school students wishing to engage with the legislative process should **not** have been confronted with the comments made by Senator Hutchings. Those students, some of which identify as LGBTQ, were deeply hurt and disturbed that they were compared to acts of bestiality and pedophilia. The students' sentiment was exacerbated especially after Senator Hutchings hypothetically recounted the idea of sexually engaging with children then physically engaged with the students.

At Wyoming Equality, we are horrified. On GSA Civics Day, we expect students to be challenged and engage in lively civic dialogue. This is not what transpired. As guaranteed by the First Amendment, Senator Hutchings may express her beliefs and views however she wishes, but her behavior is not what we expect of adults in the workplace, and we expect even more from a Wyoming elected official. The students spoke with several legislators that day. For the exception of the incident with Senator Hutchings, the students said all their interactions with legislators were civil and respectful no matter where the legislators stood on bills and issues.

LGBTQ youth seriously contemplate suicide at almost three times the rate of straight youth, and LGBTQ youth are almost five times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to straight youth according to the Center for Disease Control and 35 studies conducted in 10 countries, including the United States. Each episode of LGBTQ victimization, such as physical or verbal harassment or abuse, increases the likelihood of self-harming behavior by 2.5 times on average. Wyoming Equality works to address the youth suicide and self-harm rate in Wyoming by supporting GSAs in schools as they've been proven to significantly lower the odds of suicidal thoughts and had fewer suicide attempts among youth—regardless of whether they were gay, transgender, or straight.

So incidents like this do not happen again, it is our sincere hope that that action will be taken as a result of our providing this information about what transpired between Senator Hutchings and Central High School students. We are deeply concerned about the lasting damage Senator

Hutchings has inflicted on the GSA students in her district and the reputation she has established for the Wyoming State Legislature. The Central High School students and their sponsor deserve a clear, direct apology and clarification that Senator Hutchings behavior was unacceptable and inappropriate of an adult and elected official.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Wyoming Equality Board of Directors