

Rallying for Their Rights: Teens denounce proposed gay-club ban

GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCES; SB97: The House has yet to vote on the bill

By Jennifer W. Sanchez
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They meet in secret after dinner at Wasatch Academy.

At the private boarding high school about a two-hour drive south of Salt Lake City, students are not allowed to publicly organize gay-straight clubs. But each week, some 15 students gather to discuss issues, such as state legislation to eliminate groups like theirs.

"We know who we are and we know what we believe," said Meisja Turner, 18. "This is a way to let everyone know it's not a secret - it's no big deal [to be gay.]"

To show her support, Turner joined roughly 300 people, mostly teenagers and young adults, to rally for gay rights and equality at the State Capitol on Monday.

Under a clear sky, many people sported blue "equality" buttons and put yellow tape in the shape of an equal sign on their backs. Some carried homemade signs that read "I love and support my gay son" and "Equality - a fair and just Utah!" And flyers that read "Why is (Sen.) Chris Buttars obsessed with gay sex?" were put on car windshields around the Capitol.

Supporters said it was time that community members, regardless of sexual orientation, speak out against SB97, a proposed law sponsored by Buttars, that would give school districts the ability to eliminate gay support groups. The bill is waiting for a House vote.

Sen. Scott McCoy, a Salt Lake City Democrat and the state's only openly gay senator, told the crowd: "This is family day at the Legislature," adding that gay families deserve the same respect by lawmakers and protection by the law.

A. J. Barney, a gay college freshman, said he would have loved to have had a gay-straight alliance in high school.

"It would have been nice to have people support me for who I was instead of who I was pretending to be," Barney said.

Chris Johnson, a lesbian mother of a straight teenager, encouraged young people to be proud and stay involved in politics because social change takes time.

"It takes character to be who you are," she told the crowd. "Hatred and bigotry are bad for Utah."

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