



November 17, 2020

Sullivan County School District
Board of Directors
777 South Street
PO Box 240
Laporte, PA 18626

Dear Board President Kimberly Phillips and members of the Sullivan County School Board,

On behalf of LGBT students throughout our commonwealth, we write to you with great concern regarding the events in your district over the past week. Founded in 2011, the Pennsylvania Youth Congress is the first and only statewide LGBT youth organization in PA. For over a decade our leaders have worked with students, their families, and school districts, in promoting safer and inclusive schools for all.

We commend Superintendent Patti Cross and Board President Kimberly Phillips swiftly condemning the heinous comments made during your board meeting last week, and we wholeheartedly support inclusion trainings for school board members, administration, and staff. This training is a service we offer and we would be glad to discuss with you any way to participate or support you in this important opportunity for your staff and administration. We would like to extend a sincere thank you for standing by your students and community members by showing that their lives truly do matter to you.

However, the fact remains that Mr. Nitznski openly compared your LGBT students to the KKK and to white supremacists. A school board member has equated children just trying to live and learn like the rest of their peers to a terrorist organization. Hate speech is vulgar, senseless, and demeaning. The comments made by Mr. Nitznski were not only a blow to your LGBT students, their families, and students who have LGBT loved ones, but also to your students of color who saw groups that have committed horrendous violence upon their communities so casually weaponized by a public official who holds power over them. Regardless of what Mr. Nitznski believes or intended to communicate, the fact that he felt able to say this without realizing it would send kids a message of danger and insecurity is, at best, a display showing he is extraordinarily out of touch with what your students need for a safe learning environment. No child attending a school within your district deserves to feel alienated from their own community. More needs to be done.

Mr. Nitznski should not remain in a position of power over LGBT students and students of color within your district. It would be a complete disregard for the well-being of the children you serve. We call upon you to not allow any member of your board to hold or express beliefs as prejudicial and injurious as those spoken at your recent meeting with impunity. The members of your community have already begun to call for action, with nearly 1,000 signatures on a



petition by an alumnus insisting Mr. Nitznski resign. We are writing to urge you to set the example for the youth in your district that words and actions have consequences. Show your most vulnerable students that you are willing to fight to protect them. We ask that you formally censure Mr. Nitznski at your upcoming school board meeting and pass a resolution calling for his resignation. Should he not resign following your censure, we urge you to remove him from participation on any school board committees or functions.

If there is any remaining confusion or misconceptions regarding LGBT students and education on LGBT history in your schools, we are happy to discuss these issues with you further anytime. This is a newer topic for many people and we all want to do what is best for students. We would be glad to assist and discuss best practices and answer any questions or concerns you may have.

The Pennsylvania Youth Congress has nearly a decade of extensive experience in helping districts best serve their LGBT students, particularly in our rural areas. Please feel free to use us as a resource going forward.

Thank you for your leadership.

Respectfully Yours,

Masen Lounsbery, PYC Advocate for Northeastern Pennsylvania
Preston Heldibridle, State Policy Associate
Jason Landau Goodman, Executive Director