

**Circular Letter C-23 from the Commissioner of Education
(Series: 1997-98)**

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education

DATE: January 30, 1998

SUBJECT: 1997 Amendment to CGS Sec. 10-15c Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

In addition to our earlier general notices of all 1997 legislative changes, we will be providing more specific advice and counsel on several issues that amend the duties of local school boards and superintendents. One such issue is the legal prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Connecticut State Board of Education has stated that full access of all individuals and groups to educational opportunities, and full participation in educational experiences, should be the policy and practice of educational agencies.

In 1997, the state legislature amended Section 10-15c of the General Statutes (see below), which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion or national origin, to also prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. All students, without exception, have the right to come to school, feel safe and grow to be productive and contributing citizens. Unfortunately, some students, because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, have been subject to discrimination through abuse, harassment or exclusion from participation in educational activities. By law, such barriers to student participation must be identified and removed. The law applies to all educational programs both curricular and extracurricular.

Each local school district must review programs, services and activities to ensure that they are conducted in a manner that is free of bias. Each local school district must also prohibit harassment based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin or sexual orientation through the development and enforcement of appropriate student and staff behavior and disciplinary policies. No student or group of students should suffer the indignities of harassment which jeopardizes their right to a free public education. Our message to all students and staff members should be one of respect for all people.

SECTION 10-15c

The public schools shall be open to all children five years of age and over who reach age five on or before the first day of January of any school year, and each such child shall have, and shall be so advised by the appropriate school authorities, an equal opportunity to participate in the activities, programs and courses of study offered in such public schools, at such time as the child becomes eligible to participate in such activities, programs and courses of study, without discrimination on account of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation; provided boards of education may, by vote at a meeting duly called, admit to any school children under five years of age.

TSS:fsm