

California passes law to address bullying of Sikh, Muslim students

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San Francisco: The California state unanimously passed a new law that promises to provide a safer school environment for children from the minority communities.

File pic: A Sikh boy displays a placard against bullying of minorities

The bill was passed unanimously in the California Assembly 79 to 0 and passed 34 to 3 in the California Senate.

This comes amid growing incidents of bullying and discrimination against Sikh-American, South Asian and Muslim students in the US.

California Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 2845 also known as the "Safe Place to Learn Act," seeks to address bullying of South Asian, Muslim, and Sikh-American students as well as those mistaken to belong to those groups.

"This is a landmark bill for California that will curb bullying and discrimination in the classroom," said Harjit Kaur, Community Development Manager for the Sikh Coalition.

"AB 2845 ensures the right of every child to practice his/her faith freely in public schools," Kaur said.

"(This bill) is very important to Muslim and Sikh children because both of our communities have seen a huge rise in the bullying of Muslim and perceived to be Muslim students," Saad Sweilem, civil rights attorney at CAIR-Sacramento Valley (CAIR-SV), said.

"Students from both communities played an instrumental role in getting this bill passed by testifying in front of Assembly members about their own personal experiences being bullied. Because of our current social and political climate, this issue is a major one and we're very hopeful that this bill will tackle it head on," Sweilem added.

According to The Sikh Coalition, 50 per cent of Sikh students and 67 per cent of turbaned Sikh-American students nationally have experienced school bullying.

"AB 2845" provides teachers, staff, and administrators with school and community resources to help prevent, identify, and remedy bullying and discrimination in the classroom.

The Sikh Coalition, the Sikh American Legal Defence and Education Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice-California, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations-California all collaborated in helping draft and promulgate this bill.

- With PTI Inputs