



March 16, 2014

Rodney Williams
Principal, Sheridan High School
700 West Vine St.
Sheridan, AR 72150

Brenda Haynes
Superintendent, Sheridan School District
400 North Rock Street
Sheridan, AR 72150

Dear Mr. Williams and Ms. Haynes:

Your unacceptable decision to censor the profile of Taylor Ellis in the Sheridan High School yearbook has recently come to my attention. I am writing on behalf of the more than 1.5 million members and supporters of the Human Rights Campaign, including thousands of fair-minded Arkansans, to respectfully request that you reverse your decision and allow the profile of openly gay student, Taylor Ellis, to be printed as originally planned. Regardless of print deadlines, it would be unconscionable to release the yearbook with the omission of Taylor's well-deserved profile.

If not resolved immediately, this act of discriminatory censorship will send a dangerous message to all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in Sheridan, across Arkansas and around the nation -- that they are second-class citizens and their lives are not equally valid. Instead of respecting the wishes of Taylor's fellow students to recognize him in their yearbook, you have told him and other students who may already feel marginalized that they are not an equally valued part of the Sheridan high school student body.

As an Arkansas native and a former elementary school student in Sheridan, I was taught the Golden Rule -- about treating others as we would like to be treated. Whatever you may say about your intentions, it does not change the fact that you have failed to uphold these values that all fair-minded Arkansans share. Addressing bullying requires stopping bullies, not muzzling harmless free expression.

Fortunately, there is still time to reverse course and to send a powerful message of inclusion. On behalf of Taylor and his family, I urge you to do whatever necessary to ensure the publication of Taylor's story in the yearbook.

I thank you for your attention, await your reply, and am available for any questions or comments you may have.

Sincerely,

Chad Griffin
President
Human Rights Campaign