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**MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF THE
DIGNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS ACT**

Interfaith Impact of New York State strongly supports the Dignity for All Students Act (A03661B/S1987A), which will protect students in New York's public schools from harassment and discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnic group, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender (including gender identity and expression).

We commend the 131 Assembly Members who voted for this bill. It is currently in the Senate Investigations and Rules Committee.

New York State Education Law has no explicit prohibition against harassment of any kind in primary or secondary education. Public school students cannot afford to wait for the protections provided by this bill. Media reports of students committing suicide because of bullying confirm the need for us to take action.

Harassment is a serious problem in our schools as well as in the community. Students who are being bullied do not have equal access to educational opportunity. This should be unacceptable in New York State. We should no longer leave our children vulnerable to harassment and abuse because of perceived differences. Our shared faith traditions call on us to treat everyone as we ourselves would wish to be treated.

At least 10 states, including California, Maine, Minnesota and New Jersey, and many New York localities including Albany, Buffalo, New York City, Rochester and others have passed comprehensive anti-harassment measures.

Children have a right to feel safe in their schools. Now it is up to the State Senate and the Governor to make sure that students in New York's public schools are protected.

Interfaith IMPACT of New York State is a statewide coalition of congregations and individuals from Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, Reform Jewish and other faith traditions. We advocate from our shared faith traditions for the common good in New York State.

May 11, 2009