

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Senator Thomas Umberg, Chair
2025-2026 Regular Session

SB 998 (Gonzalez)
Version: April 8, 2026
Hearing Date: April 21, 2026
Fiscal: Yes
Urgency: No
ME

SUBJECT

Educational equity: discrimination prevention coordinators

DIGEST

This bill establishes roles and responsibilities for the Religious Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, the Race and Ethnicity Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, the Gender Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, and the LGBTQ+ Discrimination Prevention Coordinator under the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and additionally requires the OCR to employ a Disability Discrimination Prevention Coordinator to be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, the Legislature enacted SB 48 that created four discrimination prevention coordinators. (SB 48 (Gonzalez), Ch. 429, Stats. 2025.) The legislation did not define the roles and responsibilities of the discrimination prevention coordinators. The author brings this bill to establish guidelines and responsibilities of these positions. Also in 2025, the Legislature enacted legislation to establish the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the Government Operations Agency and an Anti-Semitism Discrimination Prevention Coordinator. (AB 715 (Zbur), Ch. 428, Stats. 2025.) That legislation set forth the roles and responsibilities of the Anti-Semitism Discrimination Prevention Coordinator.

This bill establishes roles and responsibilities of the Religious Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, the Race and Ethnicity Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, the Gender Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, and the LGBTQ+ Discrimination Prevention Coordinator under the OCR and additionally requires the OCR to employ a Disability Discrimination Prevention Coordinator to be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. This bill also requires the OCR to employ a Deputy Coordinator on Anti-Black Racism, a Deputy Coordinator on Anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander (Anti-AAPI) Discrimination, and a Deputy Coordinator on Anti-Latino

Discrimination, and requires these deputy coordinators to report directly to the Race and Ethnicity Discrimination Prevention Coordinator.

This bill is supported by Disability Rights California, the California Legislative LGBTQ Caucus, and Equality California. The Committee has received no opposition to the measure. According to the author, the Chairs of the California Legislative Latino, AAPI, Black, and LGBTQ+ Caucuses are collaborating on this bill as a follow up to SB 48. This bill passed out of the Senate Education Committee with a vote of 5 to 1.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAW

Existing law:

- 1) Provides that no student shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristics that is contained in the definition of hate crimes, including immigration status, in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives state financial assistance. (Educ. Code § 220.)
- 2) Prohibits the governing board of a school district, a county board of education, or the governing body of a charter school from adopting or approving the use of any textbook, instructional material, supplemental instructional material, or curriculum for classroom instruction if the use of the textbook, instructional material, supplemental instructional material, or curriculum would subject a pupil to unlawful discrimination pursuant to Section 220 of the Education Code. (Educ. Code § 244.)
- 3) Establishes that it is the policy of the State of California to afford all persons in public schools, regardless of their disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other specified characteristic, equal rights and opportunities in the educational institutions of the state.
- 4) Establishes the Office of Civil Rights, under the administration of the Government Operations Agency. (Educ. Code §33802.1.)
- 5) Requires the Office of Civil Rights to employ a Religious Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, a Race and Ethnicity Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, a Gender Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, and an LGBTQ Discrimination Prevention Coordinator. Existing law requires each of the coordinators to be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. (Educ. Code §§33803.2; 33803.3; 33803.4; 22803.5.)

This bill:

- 1) Requires the Office of Civil Rights to employ a Disability Discrimination Prevention Coordinator to be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.
- 2) Changes the title of the LGBTQ Discrimination Prevention Coordinator to instead be the LGBTQ+ Discrimination Prevention Coordinator.
- 3) Requires each of the coordinators, in consultation with the State Department of Education, and under the supervision of the Government Operations Agency, to, among other things:
 - a) develop, consult on, and provide discrimination education to teachers, staff, governing board and body members, administrators, and other local educational agency personnel to identify and proactively prevent discrimination, as provided;
 - b) provide technical assistance, upon specified request, to local educational agencies to access restorative justice resources, training, and practitioners; and
 - c) engage with local educational agencies to ensure administrators are equipped to address conflicts at an early stage with the goal of proactively resolving incidents of discrimination, as specified.
- 4) Requires the Office of Civil Rights to employ a Deputy Coordinator on Anti-Black Racism, a Deputy Coordinator on Anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander (Anti-AAPI) Discrimination, and a Deputy Coordinator on Anti-Latino Discrimination, requires these deputy coordinators to report directly to the Race and Ethnicity Discrimination Prevention Coordinator.
- 5) Requires the Office of Civil Rights to provide resources and training on how to properly assist in cases of discrimination that involve the intersectionality of protected characteristics, as provided.

COMMENTS

1. Stated need for the bill

According to the author:

Last year, the Legislature passed SB 48 (Gonzalez/Weber/Fong/Ward), which created four discrimination prevention coordinators under the newly established Office of Civil Rights. My colleagues and I committed to working on subsequent legislation to clarify the role of each coordinator and create a Disability Discrimination Prevention coordinator based on stakeholder feedback. SB 998 builds on that commitment by establishing clear guidelines and expectations for the service coordinators to provide upon the request of the

local educational agency to ensure that all student populations receive equal protection, proactive support services, and timely responses to discriminatory incidents. With the dismantling of the Federal Department of Education, the state must step up to foster a positive campus climate, deliver targeted support services for our student population, and address discrimination against any student in California schools.

2. Support

The California LGBTQ Caucus writes the following in support of the bill:

While California law currently prohibits discrimination in educational settings on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity or expression, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other protected characteristics, enforcement through the Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP) has at times been delayed or inconsistent. The COVID-19 pandemic and other systemic challenges have exacerbated these gaps, and recent federal rollbacks have heightened risks to vulnerable students, including LGBTQ+ and immigrant youth.

According to the California Department of Justice's 2025 State of Pride Report, overall anti-LGBTQ+ bias hate incidents rose 13.9% in one year alone, while anti-transgender bias hate incidents rose by 12.3%. These are not just statistics – this is a call to action. Hate and harassment targeting youth is increasing, and it is showing up in our schools. FBI data shows that schools are now the third most common location for reported hate crimes nationwide, and the California Civil Rights Department found that 80% of youth aged 12-17 who experienced hate did so at school.

SB 998 ensures that schools have clear guidance and designated staff to prevent discrimination and respond promptly when incidents occur. By defining the responsibilities of the centralized role focused on LGBTQ+ student protections, the bill empowers educators, parents, and students with the tools they need to maintain safe, equitable, and supportive learning environments. This measure is a critical step toward reducing harassment, bullying, and discrimination in California's schools and ensuring that all students can thrive without fear of bias or harm.

Disability Rights California writes the following in support of SB 998:

DRC provides legal advice to thousands of disabled students and their families across California every year. Unfortunately, we still hear many stories of discrimination based on disability and other protected characteristics in educational settings.

SB 998 is an important and timely expansion upon last year's SB 48 that not only clarifies the roles of the Discrimination Prevention Coordinators for Religion, Race and Ethnicity, Gender, and LGBTQ+ students under the newly established Office of Civil Rights, but also adds a Disability Discrimination Prevention Coordinator to this new structure. Despite longstanding state and federal civil rights laws, students with disabilities continue to face discrimination in schools in the form of disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline, failure to provide reasonable accommodations and disability-related supports and services, and retaliation for self-advocacy.

Preventing disability discrimination in California schools is critical, as approximately 35% of education equity complaints processed by the California Department of Education (CDE) in 2025 included an allegation of discrimination or retaliation based on disability status, per the 2025 Annual Statistical Summary released by the CDE.

SB 998 also recognizes that students often fall into more than one protected class, and that an "intersectional" approach to preventing cases of discrimination is needed in our diverse schools and state. For example, in many instances of disability discrimination, there is also discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and/or national origin, or another protected characteristic. The CDE data clearly demonstrate this, with well over half of all education equity complaints filed under two or more categories. Therefore, it is vital that all Discrimination Prevention Coordinators work beyond their specific title and subject matter to allow for a comprehensive approach to preventing discrimination in our schools.

DRC also applauds the significant emphasis on preventing discrimination in the Coordinator roles and responsibilities. Proactively fostering positive, inclusive, and connected school environments will reduce instances of discrimination and exclusion that students with protected characteristics experience at school. This approach also strengthens compliance, reduces legal exposure, and fosters inclusive learning environments for all students.

The Committee has not received opposition to this bill.

SUPPORT

California Legislative LGBTQ Caucus

Disability Rights California

Equality California

Youth Justice Education Clinic at Loyola Law School's Center for Juvenile Law and Policy

OPPOSITION

None known

RELATED LEGISLATION

Pending Legislation: None known.

Prior Legislation:

AB 715 (Zbur, Ch. 428, Stats. 2025) (1) establishes the OCR under the administration of GovOps and the position of Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator within OCR; (2) required LEAs that know or have reason to know that instructional or professional development materials were used that violate existing anti-discrimination laws to investigate and remediate the action; (3) required instruction and instructional materials to be factually accurate, align with the adopted curriculum and existing standards for instructional materials, and be consistent with accepted standards of professional responsibility; (4) authorized the CDE to require specified corrective action be taken by LEAs; and, (5) required specified corrective action be taken by organizations contracted to provide instructional or professional development materials if those materials are found to violate specified provisions of this bill.

SB 48 (Gonzalez, Ch. 429, Stats. 2025) requires the OCR under GovOps to employ a Religious Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, a Race and Ethnicity Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, a Gender Discrimination Prevention Coordinator, and an LGBTQ Discrimination Prevention Coordinator. Requires that these positions all be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

SB 1421 (Stern, 2024) would have required the CDE to establish the OCR within the CDE to receive and investigate complaints reported through the UCP that allege unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying; to assume the CDE's duties as it pertains to these complaints; and to develop procedures to optimize complaint reporting and response. SB 1421 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1078 (Jackson, Ch. 229, Stats. 2023), among other things, required the CDE to issue guidance related to how to help school districts, COEs, charter schools, and school personnel manage conversations about race and gender, and how to review instructional materials to ensure that they represent diverse perspectives and are culturally relevant.

AB 1327 (Weber, Ch. 366, Stats. 2023) required the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) to report to the Legislature every three years on instances of racial discrimination or harassment, and required the CIF to develop, in consultation with community

organizations that represent the interests of ethnic groups and communities of color, a standardized incident form to track instances of racial discrimination or harassment that occur at high school sporting games or sporting events, and annually post those results on the CIF website.

SB 857 (Laird, Ch. 228, Stats.2023) required the SPI, on or before July 1, 2024, to convene an advisory task force to identify the statewide needs of LGBTQ students and report its findings to the Legislature, the SPI, and the Governor by January 1, 2026.

AB 493 (Gloria, Ch. 775, Stats. 2019) required that, no later than July 1, 2021, the CDE develop resources or update existing resources for in-service training on schoolsite and community resources for the support of LGBTQ students, for use in LEAs, including charter schools serving students in grades 7-12. Required the CDE to periodically provide online training on this topic that can be accessed on a statewide basis.

PRIOR VOTES:

Senate Education Committee (Ayes 5, Noes 1)
