

Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law
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TESTIMONY OF CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 1094, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL BULLYING FEBRUARY 13, 2007

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a nonprofit organization affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law, which provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. Through our TeamChild project which is designed to improve the outcome for children in the juvenile justice system, we have represented many special education students who are the victims of serious bullying.

I am here today to emphasize the Center's support for Raised Bill No. 1094, An Act Concerning School Bullying, which calls for a broader definition of "bullying," greater accountability from teachers, staff, administrators, and boards of education, as well as a state-funded comprehensive training program for teachers and administrators in the prevention of bullying. Specifically, the bill calls for the implementation of important features to any truly successful anti-bullying program: 1) deleting the clause, "which acts are repeated against the same student over time," from the definition of "bullying" so that preventative measures can be taken at an earlier stage, 2) adding a fine for noncompliance with the reporting provisions of anti-bullying policies, 3) withholding funds from districts that fail to develop and adhere to district-wide anti-bullying policies, 4) providing funds for school districts' anti-bullying programs, and 5) requiring training for teachers and administrators in the prevention of bullying.

Approximately 30 percent of all children and youth in grades 6 through 10 have been bullied or have bullied other children "sometimes" or more often within a semester.¹ Bullying occurs in rural, suburban, and urban communities, and among children of every income level, race, and geographic region. Child surveys consistently agree that bullying is the most common serious problem of the school-age child. About 10 percent of children are directly involved in frequent and serious bullying, but all students are affected by bullying, whether they are bystanders or not. Students live in a state of tension and fear of openness and self-expression because bullying exists. Bullying is a traumatic childhood experience, with effects which persist into adulthood. Children who bully most frequently are more likely to drink alcohol and use tobacco, have lower academic achievement, and have more aggression and anti-social behavior, including criminality as adults. Children bullied frequently are more likely to have more health complaints as well as anxiety, depression and poor self-esteem, and are more likely to skip school or feign illness. Being bullied also lowers academic performance.²



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¹ T.R. Nansel, M. Overpeck, R.S. Pilla, J. Ruan, B. Simons-Morton, & P. Scheidt, *Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association With Psychosocial Adjustment*, 285 JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, 2094-2100 (2001).

² New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention, NJBAP Bullying – Key Points, www.njbullying.org/resources.htm (last visited February 12, 2007).

The primary cause of bullying involves the characteristics of the school where it takes place, in particular whether school leaders and staff take effective steps to prevent bullying and to address it at early stages when it occurs. It is not enough to have an anti-bullying policy; the particulars matter a great deal. Research suggests that the best way to deal with bullying is through comprehensive programs that focus on changing the climate of a school and the social norms of the group.

The bill mandates a school-wide environment that discourages bullying, and by proposing a multi-disciplinary training program that addresses the reasons for engaging in bullying it thereby attacks the problem at its core. This program would educate students about the consequences of bullying. Students would also learn about people of different backgrounds through cultural education. The program mandates special attention to easily distracted and special education students, youth who are particularly vulnerable to getting involved in bullying acts, both as perpetrators and as victims.

At least 15 states have passed laws addressing bullying among school children, motivated at least in part by tragic shootings at several U.S. high schools in the later-1990s. The proposed bill parallels legislation enacted in other states. *See* N.J. Stat. §18A:37-15 (2007) (broad definition and concrete procedure for reporting acts of bullying); *see also* 70 Okl. St. §24-100.4 (2006) (anti-bullying policy involving students, teachers, and parents); *see also* N.H. RSA 193-F:3 (2006) (mandatory reporting for school employee witnesses of bullying.)

Schools have a responsibility to safeguard the welfare of their students and to assure their right to a nondiscriminatory learning environment. This bill presents a great opportunity for Connecticut to be a leader in the nationwide effort to reduce school bullying and to ensure that Connecticut's children are able to reap the rewards of their school environments without the paralyzing fear of being bullied. Therefore the Center urges you to pass Raised Bill No. 1094, An Act Concerning School Bullying. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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KMG