



THE CONNECTICUT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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February 11, 2007

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Committee on Education:

My name is Dr. Virginia Shiller. I am a member of the Connecticut Psychological Association, Chair of their Children & Youth Committee, and a Lecturer at the Yale Child Study Center. My testimony is in regard to Raised Bill No. 1094, "An Act Concerning School Bullying." I am heartened that your committee is concerned about ensuring implementation of the anti-bullying bill which was signed into law in 2002.

We have a very good bill on the books, but unfortunately it is the impression of many of us that schools either lack the know-how or the motivation to effectively address the problem. While I understand that the provisions in Bill No. 1094 stipulating that teachers, staff members, and administrators who fail to follow specified policies will be fined is aimed at motivating school personnel to take action, I fear that this is not the best way to truly reduce bullying.

Any sanctions – either against school personnel, school districts, or students who victimize others – must be accompanied by education in positive ways to change problematic behaviors. Just as victims and bystanders need to learn how to stand up to bullies, educators themselves need to learn good skills for intervening.

If teachers simply file reports within a school that does not have a good plan for follow-up and efforts to change the whole school climate in which bullying takes place, the result could actually be hurtful for victims. Bullies may find a private place (perhaps outside school) to punish the victim, threatening that if they ever get them in trouble again, they will be victimized even more severely. And, there is no evidence that simply penalizing teachers and staff who do not report, or school administrators who do not investigate reports, will solve the problem. Further, administrators need to be working in a system that is not conducive to bullying, and any sanctions against bullies should be in the context of a school climate in which bullying is not "cool."

There *are* excellent, well-researched programs that prove that comprehensive programs can significantly reduce bullying. Rather than withholding funds from schools who fail to perform any one of the steps required by the 2002 law, I would much prefer to see a plan to provide guidance for schools in how to choose and implement scientifically validated programs.

Thank you for your time and attention.