

*empowering young women
to lead their best lives possible*

**Testimony of
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The Young Women's Leadership Program
A project of the CT General Assembly's
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Education Committee
Tuesday, February 13, 2007**

**Re;
SB 1094, AAC School Bullying
HB 7017, AAC Democracy Education in Elementary Schools**

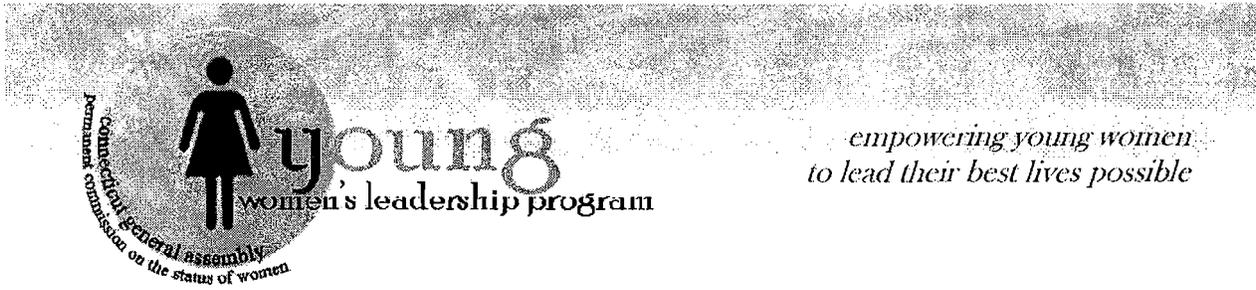
Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Michelle Noehren and I am the co-chair of the Young Women's Leadership Program, which is a project of the Connecticut General Assembly's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and present a young woman's view on two different topics.

Bullying in Schools

The Young Women's Leadership Program supports S.B. No. 1094 AAC School Bullying. We believe that holding people accountable for failing to report bullying is an important step to show young people that bullying is a behavior that will not be tolerated. We would also like to take this opportunity to suggest that the committee review the language in section (a) that defines bullying as "overt behavior".

There are several types of bullying. The most known type is physical bullying which is easy to see and thus easier to solve. However, emotional/psychological bullying is also a serious issue, an issue that has yet to really be addressed, likely because it is not

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“overt”. Emotional bullying tends to happen more from girls to girls but does happen within the context of boys relationships.

Another term for emotional bullying is relational aggression. This perhaps more subversive form of bullying is defined as the use of relationships to directly or indirectly manipulate and hurt others. Relationally aggressive behaviors include exclusion, malicious gossip and rumor spreading, teasing and name calling, alliance building, covert physical aggression and cyberbullying.¹ It has two main components: an imbalance of power and the intent to harm. An example of relational aggression is putting conditions on friendships and this type of behavior starts early. Saying things like, “I’m not going to sleepover if you don’t give me your toy” may not seem very harmful but in fact these kinds of statements indicate bullying behavior that is likely to get worse if it is not addressed.²

Why is it that boys and girls engage in different types of bullying behavior? The major theory is that because girls are raised to “be nice” so when they become angry they resort to using more indirect forms of aggression to maintain a façade of “niceness”. So they may manipulate a situation like the one mentioned above instead of becoming physically aggressive.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women recently conducted a teen poll. The poll found that 63% of young women as compared to 43% of young men know a teenager who has experienced unwanted sexual behavior, including unwanted comments, jeers, intimidation, forced physical contact or assault. In addition, 53% of girls and 23% of boys said going to a safer school would improve their lives a great deal.³

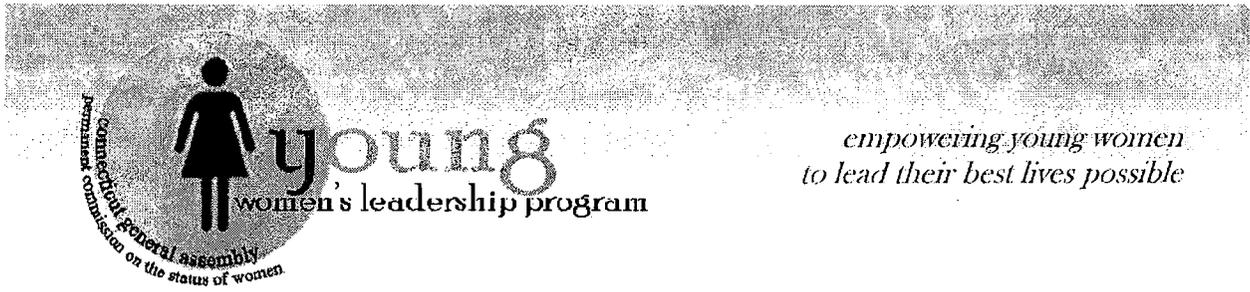
Similarly, the Ophelia Project’s national relational aggression study now includes data for nearly 2,000 students across the country. Their research demonstrates that 27%, or

¹ http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/ra_facts.htm

² <http://www.childrentoday.com/redirect.php?page=/resources/articles/emotionalbullying.htm>

³ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/PCSW/Publications/teen%20poll%20executive%20summary.pdf>

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more than one in four students, do not feel emotionally safe at school, thus indicating the need for significant changes within our nation's schools and communities.⁴

Clearly something harmful is happening in our schools. The challenge is that emotional bullying can be much harder to detect because it is often secretive and done in a manipulative way. We believe that increasing public awareness about what emotionally bullying is and how to deal with it is the first step towards addressing this serious problem.

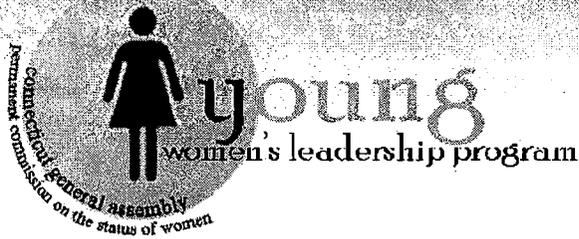
According to the National Education Association, in the United States alone, 160,000 children miss school each day due to fear of being tormented by their classmates. Research has shown that relational aggression can lead to higher incidences of depression, school drop-outs, substance abuse, early parenthood, delinquency and criminal behavior.

Again, the Young Women's Leadership Program supports initiatives to expand public awareness of relational aggression, or emotionally bullying. We would also support changing section (a) of SB 1094 to include covert bullying in the definition of bullying. We thank the committee for your continued commitment to curbing bullying in schools and we would be happy to work with you to strategize how we can begin to put a stop to the horrors of emotional bullying.

Democracy Education in Elementary Schools

The Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) also supports HB 7017, AAC Democracy Education in Elementary Schools. The goal of the YWLP is to empower young women to lead their best lives possible and to provide young women with as many opportunities for leadership as possible. We believe that by providing elementary age students with an understanding of the democratic process, girls and young women would be more likely to take part in the electoral process whether that means voting or even one day running for office. Education is the first step towards

⁴ http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/ra_schools.htm



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empowerment and so we support efforts to increase student's education of the political process.

The Young Women's Leadership Program was established in 2006 as a project of the Connecticut General Assembly's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. It is lead by a group of young women representing a wide variety of career fields and areas of expertise.

The mission of the Young Women's Leadership Program is to inspire and empower young women in high schools, vocational schools, colleges and beyond to emerge as leaders. We will provide testimony on several issues to highlight the perspectives of young women and to educate legislators about how different legislation would affect young women throughout the state.