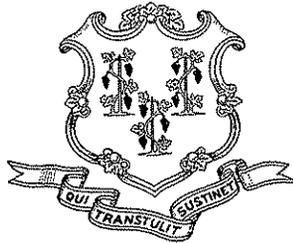


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State of Connecticut

SENATE

Fourth District

Chief Deputy Majority Leader
Chair
Public Health Committee
Vice Chair
Judiciary Committee
Member
Appropriations Committee
Commerce Committee

March 10, 2008

Public Hearing Testimony RE:

S.B. 649 An Act Concerning School Learning Environment

In 2003 the state of Connecticut passed landmark school bullying legislation which sought to reduce the incidence of school bullying in our state by requiring each local and regional board of education to develop a policy to address the existence of bullying in schools.

Five years have now passed since the implementation of the state's school bullying policies, but bullying continues to be a problem in our schools. There are several aspects of the original legislation that have allowed this problem to continue. First, the original legislation was absent of any enforcement mechanism. It required boards of education to develop policies to address bullying, but failed to impart consequences if they did not do so. Furthermore, the law as it is currently written requires bullying policies to be developed by school districts but does not require that they be implemented.

My constituents have made it clear that the current law is inadequate and unacceptable. Children in this state are still suffering daily from intimidation and physical and emotional abuse at the hands of school bullies and they are demanding change.

SB 649 AAC School Learning Environments seeks to fix the deficiencies that have been realized in the original legislation. Under this legislation boards of education will be held accountable for fulfilling the provisions of the anti-bullying act or be subject to the withholding of monetary funds from the state. Moreover, the bill will require school boards to implement the anti-bullying policies that they develop.

In addition to these changes, I would suggest a provision in the statute that requires interventions eliminate the threat of physical harm to the victim of bullying in cases where repeated physical attacks have occurred.

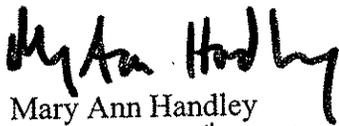
Recently, parents from my district have expressed dissatisfaction with a schools anti-bullying policy. The policy was implemented and enforced, but the parents still found the school's intervention strategy to be inadequate. In this case the school reduced but failed to eliminate unsupervised interaction between the bully and the victim. The end

result was a continuation of bullying at times when supervision was lacking. The school's actions fulfilled the requirements of the states school bullying laws; however it still left a child open to physical threat and harm.

It is essential that the law be amended to ensure that compliance with the law will ensure the physical safety of a bullying victim to avoid this issue. I encourage the committee to address this issue as the bill moves forward.

In closing, I applaud the committee for its efforts to strengthen and improve school bullying policies throughout the state. With a few small changes to our current statutes we can greatly improve the lives and learning environments of children across the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Ann Handley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "M" and "A".

Mary Ann Handley
State Senator 4th District