

Good afternoon, my name is Dennis Carrithers, and I am appearing in my capacity as the Assistant Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Schools to express our opposition to:

S. B. No. 1056 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS' RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH.

The Connecticut Association of Schools represents over 1100 elementary and secondary schools in Connecticut in advocating for the best interests of schools, their students, faculty and administrators. CAS supports a wide range of activities from academics to athletics, as well as providing professional development for school leaders.

This bill expresses the responsibility for school administrators to enforce student conduct in school or at school sponsored events, but would prohibit holding students accountable for behaviors off-school grounds, including electronic communications. Schools prepare young adults to be productive citizens and to be well aware of the responsibilities as well as their rights.

By creating the internet as a protected universe of communications, this bill prevents school officials from taking steps to ensure the safety and welfare of teachers and students. Every day school leaders are dealing with abuses of the internet that affect the school with incidents of humiliation, threats, embarrassment, harassment, and ridicule. To tie the hands of administrators in their efforts to establish school climates of respect would open the door to further abuse. They are not seeking to patrol the internet looking for problems; the problems are coming to them, and they are doing their best to provide safe and healthy school environments.

Last year Public Act 08-160 changed the definition of bullying and required school districts to have policies with intervention and prevention plans. Schools are required to label as bullying acts intended to ridicule, harass, humiliate, or intimidate another student and to demonstrate their actions of intervention. This bill would exempt internet speech from being dealt with and would conflict with the goal of eliminating bullying among students. Establishing internet speech as exempt from consequences will promote cyber-bullying and increase the number of bullying incidents.

This completes my testimony. Thank you for your consideration.

Dennis C. Carrithers
CAS Assistant Executive Director