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Testimony regarding Proposed S.B. No.1138: An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws

Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Charles Barrett and I live in Farmington. I am a student at the University Of Connecticut School Of Social Work in West Hartford and I am a member of the National Association of Social Workers. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 1138, An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws.

A report published in The Journal of the American Medical Association in April of 2001 found that the prevalence of bullying amongst the nation's youth to be "substantial". The authors found that almost 30% of the nationally representative sample of youth in grades 6 through 8 reported involvement in bullying; either as victim, bully, or both. A study published in the July edition of the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry found that 49.5% of student participants had reported being bullied online and 33.7% reported having bullied others while online. Another study published in the October 2009 edition of the Journal of Adolescent Health found that within the two month period leading up to the survey conducted with their study sample, 20.8% of respondents reported involvement in physical bullying, 53.6% in verbal bullying, 51.4% in social bullying, and 13.6% in cyber bullying. Recent news stories featuring victims of bullying have received the attention of national news outlets. We could cite statistics and point to news stories for much of the day but what we will lose is the personal effects bullying has on an individual.

I sit before you as an adult who was bullied as a child. From the ages of 6 to 14 I suffered at the hand of bullies. I came from a home in which both my parents worked and due to several factors I felt that I could not turn to them for help. I turned to the school I attended. The school administrators made me feel as if bullying was the natural order of things. "Boys will be boys" was something that I heard quite often. I was told to "fight back" and "stand up for myself"; these pieces of advice assumed that I had not yet tried to do such things, when in fact- I had.

Due to bullying and the reactions by school administrators I felt that I was bullied because of something inherently wrong with me. After all, they made me feel as if this was the natural order of things. I became distrustful, scared, and reclusive. I stopped participating in class and it hampered my ability to learn. At school, I didn't feel safe and that should not be the natural order of things.

I was lucky; I had family and friends that were able to provide me with enough support to see my way through the persistent bullying. I was able to get respite from the bullies long

enough to grow and progress both socially and in terms of my education. I worry for the children who do not have such respite and support. In this day and age of social networking it can only be more difficult for victims of bullying to escape and find respite in a safe place free from bullies. I worry that the victims of bullying will convince themselves that there is something inherently wrong with them.

It is for this reason that I support Senate Bill 1138, An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws. By passing such legislation you send a message to children who are bullied that there is nothing wrong with them and that this is not the natural order of things. You send the message that they are worth more to the world than they realize.

I thank you for your consideration on this important issue,

Charles Barrett, MSW Student