

Testimony for Education Committee
On Raised Bill 1138, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of*
School Bullying Laws

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March 11, 2011

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Fonfara, Representative McCrory, Senator Giuliano, Representative Boucher and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Elizabeth Connelly and I am the Communications and Media Consultant for The Governor's Prevention Partnership. For over 20 years, our non-profit organization has provided resources and services so that young people in our state can grow up free from substance abuse, underage drinking, violence, and bullying and be able to take their place in our future workforce. I'm here today to read a letter on behalf of a student from Enfield that was a victim of cyber-bullying.

While I was away last year, my boyfriend at the time was talking to another girl inappropriately. When I returned home and was at lunch the next day, the lunch table behind me kept screaming "your boyfriend is cheating on you!" Turns out the girl he was talking to was at the table and told her friends what had happened. I pretty much ignored what they were saying. This went on for about a week until one day they said, "they weren't surprised he was cheating on me, because I was fat and disgusting." When they said that, I felt a mixture of things. I was mad, sad, hurt, and confused. The girls saying this stuff were on my bus and they started to say it on the bus too. That night, I unfortunately added fuel to the fire. I went onto Facebook and I messaged the girls saying that we were in high school, can we please grow up and stop. One of the four girls didn't like what I said. Both of us started to fight over the Facebook message I had sent, and over Formspring. She was calling me a cow and a whale. She also said she was going to put me in the hospital. Instead of stopping it, I let my anger get the best of me, and I said stuff back. I know now that I made things worse by saying those comments on Facebook, because things took a turn for the worse. From that night in December until March, I didn't tell anyone what was going on. I didn't tell anyone because I was afraid to get called a snitch or to have things get turned against me. I also didn't tell anyone because I was embarrassed and ashamed that this was going on. Every day when I got onto the bus, these few girls would say terrible things to me. In the halls after every period, they had their friends say stuff to me too. At lunch they continued to say things to me. On the bus, on Facebook, on Formspring, and even if I went for a walk by my house because they lived near me... they would moo at me, call me Shamu the whale, block my way in the halls, and push me out of the way. They said they weren't surprised that my

boyfriend was cheating on me, that I was fat, and that I shouldn't even go to this school, or even be alive.

One day in March, I was waiting outside of my class with my boyfriend and these kids that the girls were friends with, were telling my boyfriend to dump me because I was inhuman and a whale. At that point, I had been putting up with this almost every day for four months. Hearing what they had just said caused me to break down and to lose it. For the first time, I

finally told an adult what was going on. Even after talking to an adult at the school, it still continued to happen, but it slowly stopped. My boyfriend at the time, me, and the four girls involved had mediation with our school social worker and the Vice Principal at my school. The mediation worked, and I am even friends with some of the girls now.

Even a year after all this happened, I am still affected by this. When it was actually happening, I didn't want to do a lot. I got really depressed, my grades dropped, and I didn't want to hang out with my friends, because I felt like they didn't understand. Because of this, my friends and I fought a lot and I am no longer friends with my three best friends at that time. People don't realize the consequences that their actions and how they affect others. You may not think a little comment or a fight over Facebook is a big deal, but it is. Over the internet, everyone can see it. And when that happens, anyone can get in on it.

That is why many teens contemplate, attempt, or even complete suicide...because of cyber bullying. I've never told anyone this before, but when all of this was going on I constantly thought about doing this myself. To feel like everyone is against you and you have nobody on your side is the scariest thing ever. Losing your best friends and your self confidence hurts more than anything, and makes you question everything, even living. No matter how alone you feel, or how you feel like you have no one, you always do. You have your real friends, school teachers, your family members, or even a school social worker at schools. Cyber bullying is WRONG, no matter how funny it seems at the time. It can have serious affects on someone and serious consequences for the bully. I want people today to realize the seriousness of cyber bullying. I want more education and awareness in the schools about how harmful cyber bullying is. I also think that there should be more education available for students and teachers on how to prevent cyber bullying and how to help out in a situation. People need to know how to be there for somebody in a situation like this and to prevent suicides because of cyber bullying. Finally, I want there to be stricter laws in Connecticut on cyber bullying. Some cases of it can be very serious and result in suicide. If that happens I believe that the people responsible for the emotional abuse caused by cyber bullying should be held responsible for their actions. Students are **dying** in the name of 'free speech' as students and adults use social medias to intimidate, harass, demean, ridicule, and spread rumors about others. By enforcing laws on cyber bullying, it shows that people are taking the issue seriously and are working for a change. Cyber bullying is the beginning of hate, which left unchecked and unpunished, will only escalate.