



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.

81 Wolcott Hill Road, Wethersfield, CT 06109-1242 - (860) 571-7446 - Fax (860) 571-7452 - Email admin@cabe.org

Testimony regarding SB 1138

An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws

I am Cal Heminway, chairman of the Granby Board of Education. I am also a former Chair and member of the CREC governing Council and Immediate Past President of CABE. I would like to offer brief remarks regarding some aspects of the proposed legislation as it applies to local districts.

It should come as no surprise to you as members of the Legislature that inappropriate student behavior is of daily concern to teachers and administrators in every district in Connecticut. Clearly, bullying does nothing to contribute to a positive and safe school environment. While bullying is of concern, it in no way encompasses the totality of inappropriate student behavior. It is reality that human behavior cannot be regulated by fiat. While a comprehensive bullying definition is likely impossible to achieve, attempting to do so does properly focus our attention on the problem.

Governor Malloy addressed Connecticut Board of Education members on Wednesday, March 8. Included in his remarks was a pledge to avoid one size fits all solutions, over regulation, and needlessly adding to our burden locally. I would ask you to review this proposed legislation and reflect on whether or not it passes any of these avoidance tests. I read it as highly prescriptive, laden with administrative requirements, and offering local boards essentially no flexibility as to organizational approaches best suited to local needs.

The mandate that districts appoint a 'safe school environment coordinator' is of particular concern as the creation of such a position could possibly create a center for a single element of student discipline and thereby diminishing the principal's authority and flexibility.

Also as written it is clear that significant additional personnel, professional, and administrative expense would be required to meet the demands of the law. Based upon the Governor's proposed budget, the Department of Education would be hard pressed to administer the program based upon "available appropriations". Demanding that local districts assign the proposed increased responsibilities "from existing school staff" will have expense implications.

In a recent discussion of this issue with high school students from around the state, they had many positive suggestions of ways to reduce the amount of bullying. Their ideas focused on education of students and staff rather than additional bureaucratic requirements. In particular, they suggested:

- Train and support students to help them make bullying by their peers unacceptable
- Insure that students know who to go to for help if they are bullied
- Support student self-esteem and enable them to respond to inappropriate conduct by their peers
- Utilize progressive discipline measures

While we are sympathetic to a more comprehensive bullying definition, we cannot support the fiscal, professional development, and prescriptive administrative demands that would be placed on districts. They would intrude upon local governance and would increase expense at the worst possible time. As written, it is clearly an unfunded mandate.

Cal Heminway, BOE Chair, Granby
March 11, 2011