

Lydia Post
Junior, Newtown High School

My name is Lydia Post. I am 16 years old and I am a junior at Newtown High School. My experience with bullying started in 7th grade. I had always had a tight knit group of friends and we did everything together. Starting early spring of 2007, they began saying things like "I hate red", "red is fat", "red should die", anything along the lines of that. I did not know what "red" meant and I didn't really care, so I never asked about it. I soon found out that they had labeled me as "red". When I asked them about it, they didn't deny it; they just laughed in my face and walked away yelling insults back at me.

The following week they took the bullying to a new level. The bathroom walls were covered in insults and vicious drawings of me. The desks in every classroom were covered in horrible remarks, often in sharpie so they could not be removed. I had lost every single friend I'd ever had and I did not know why. To you this may seem like petty middle school drama, but to me, my life seemed to be falling apart because every friend I had ever confided in turned against me.

I have a very close relationship to my mother and I told her everything, she consoled me and encouraged me to tell a teacher or guidance counselor. I thought telling an adult at school would only make the bullying worse. What I didn't realize was that it would have been much more effective that a teacher make them stop instead of trying to make them stop myself. I retaliated with anger which did not help. In circumstances like these, the best thing to do is to ask help from an adult. They can provide a mature perspective on the situation and help out in ways you never thought they could.

Looking back on this, even though it may have been one of the hardest thing I've had to go through, losing all my friends and obtaining an insecurity I haven't quite gotten over, I'm glad I went through this. It made me see who my true friends were. It also matured me and made me realize that not all things happen for a reason, but no matter what, you'll always learn from them.

Mary Hamula - Newtown High School Junior

It all started the winter of my sophomore year. I had a tight knit group of friends that I made from cross country and track, and I was actually in a relationship with someone in that group as well. Mid January, I ended the relationship without telling any of my friends because I didn't think it would be a big deal because the boy and I were still friends. I was dead wrong. The next day, none of my friends would talk to me. They flat out ignored me and snickered whenever I tried to talk to them. I tried to find out what was wrong, but none of them would tell me. Finally, one of the girls just told me that they flat out didn't like me anymore. I tried to talk it out with them, but they would shy away from any confrontation. It only got worse as time went on. I would try and try to fix things but they would ignore me and use it as a joke. I found a whole Facebook conversation between two of the girls calling me ugly and selfish. They even used my name as an adjective, calling each other a "Mary" when they were pretending to fight. I started getting anywhere between 10 and 40 form spring questions a day from the people in that group calling me horrible names like "whore", "slut", "fat", "bitch", "emo", "loser" and "worthless". I received anonymous text messages telling me to kill myself, and I often came into to school to find my locker dial covered in gum. What hurt the most about all this is that these were my *friends*. They had been there for me, knew my secrets, and I had really trusted them. To have them turn on me like they had made me feel alone and helpless, which was probably what they wanted. And then, my ex boyfriend and the girl who had been hardest on me began to date, and would grab each other's hands when I walked by them, and sat right in front of my locker every morning. But, looking back, what stands out the most to me is that I let it continue. I said nothing, and let them get to me from behind their computers and their gossip. And then I heard about Phoebe Prince. Phoebe, in case you don't know her story, was a 15 year old girl who lived in South Hadley, MA and committed suicide in 2010 after being relentlessly bullied by her peers. She was called names and even had an energy drink can thrown at her head while walking home from school. Three of my close friends live in the town where Phoebe lived, one of my friends was even a pallbearer at her funeral. This made her story so close to my heart. I felt like I really knew what Phoebe had been going through because I was going through something so similar. I felt so sad that the world had lost her for such a stupid reason. Hearing about what happened to Phoebe gave me the strength to realize that what was happening to me was not right, and I had to do something about it. Finally, with help of my therapist, I developed the strength to

stand up to the girl who had been the meanest to me throughout the year. I pulled her aside in the morning and had a face to face confrontation with her about all the things that she had done wrong to me and how it made me feel. She denied everything to my face. That's when I realized how stupid I had been. She had struck fear into me for almost a year, and yet she was nothing but a coward. This gave me a new strength that I had never had before. After confronting her, the mean behavior nearly stopped. They tried to get to me, since I had sort have become their inside joke. But the confrontation had proven to them that I wouldn't deal with it anymore. I had beaten the people who had kept me down for so long, and I proved to myself that if I believed in myself, I could be unstoppable. Being bullied the way I was gave me new motivation to help other people who may be experiencing the same things that I had. I knew that it was up to me to stop what happened to me and what happened to Phoebe from happening to someone else. So, I created a program in my school that evolved into a class that is taught to all freshman and sophomores called If It's Mean, Intervene. It teaches high school students to respect each other and to watch what they say. I also hope to institute a program in my school that will educate students on depression and suicide in honor of Phoebe. I also am involved with student government, student council, and Junior Statesmen of America in my school. I love making a difference in my community, and I tutor underprivileged children Sunday afternoons as well. I love knowing that I can make a difference, even though I am a teenager. If I hadn't gone through the experience of being bullied, I might not be as strong as I am today. However, that certainly doesn't make what these kids did to me right. Passing this bill will mean that each and every one of you is helping to prevent another innocent teenager from feeling the way that I felt, and it could even mean saving lives. I encourage you all to vote on behalf of this bill, and I thank you for listening.

Adam Oelberg - Sophomore Newtown High School

Good morning, Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Adam Oelberg- I am a sophomore at Newtown High School in Newtown, Connecticut. I am here not to offer any personal stories concerning the harassment of a close friend, nor can I share my own encounters with bullying as I have been lucky enough to avoid such unpleasant circumstances. However, I *am* here because a countless amount of students all over the state cannot say the same. On the behalf of those 42% of students who claim they have been bullied by means of the internet alone¹, I, like many others, recognize that the threat imposed by bullying, perhaps due to an increase in modern technology, is much greater today than it was several decades ago. In fact, according to recent studies by Yale University, bully victims are between 2 and 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, an action that kills more than 4,000 teens annually².

Not only are the increasing rates of teen suicide due to bullying inconsistent with the values and individual liberties this country promises to protect, but they challenge these young adults' and children's fundamental right to safety. Many students view attending their local education facility as a risk to their basic welfare and emotional health, which might explain why approximately 160,000 students stay home from school every day for fear of being bullied.² In reality, however, the rise of cyberbullying has made these victims exposed even within the privacy of their own homes. And when they log onto their computers to read what comments their peers have posted, they are staring at a screen in the dark by themselves; they have no support system. It's understandable how, when teens see an extensive list of malicious remarks as soon as they check their social networking profiles, their vulnerability and emotional insecurity escalate greatly.

Hence, it must be a priority that such a support system be encouraged in an environment where the actions of adolescents can be, in most cases, supervised and regulated. Thus, the implementation of more strictly-defined statewide requirements with regards to the way bullying is handled in schools should be an imperative step towards providing American youth with the peace of mind and comfort necessary to reach their full potential, with respect to both their well being and performance. In conclusion, we cannot allow the ignorance, insensitivity, and pure hatred of an overwhelming and growing teenage influence to dictate or judge the value of the lives of their peers. A bill such as this might easily be, with both current and preventative solutions in mind, the motivational force that ends this flaw within the schooling systems and communities of Connecticut. I thank you all for your time and consideration in addressing this pressing matter.