

**Testimony before The Education Committee  
In Support of S.B. 1138, An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws**

**Submitted by Erin Smith  
Research and Policy Analyst, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund  
March 11, 2011**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee,

As an advocate for educational equity, I am asking for your support to strengthen school bullying laws. Now is the time for strong school climate legislation. One in four (25 percent) Connecticut high school students – and 35 percent of the state's 9th graders – reported having been bullied or harassed on school property in the past year.

When we fail to prevent bullying, the results impact learning, safety, and personal well-being. Connecticut high school students who report being bullied are more likely to get less sleep, miss school because they feel unsafe, have property stolen at school, carry a weapon to school, experience dating violence, be depressed and attempt suicide (DPH, 2009). Schools can become violent, dangerous places where children feel unsafe to go and less able to concentrate and learn.

This is an educational equity concern because not all children feel safe and have equal access to learning opportunities when being bullied by their peers and feel that they have no recourse. S.B. 1138 would require that all school employees take immediate action when bullying occurs; parents will be informed; school officials will complete an investigation within 10 days and schools will respond to bullying whether it occurs at school, online (cyberbullying), on a school bus, at a bus stop, or at a school-related activity, as well as to bullying outside these settings if it disrupts a student's education or the orderly operation of a school. This response to bullying is crucially important because it sets the standard that bullying will not be tolerated and creates a safer climate.

It is also important to note that while all students are bullied, some students experience harassment more than others like students who are or are perceived to be LGBT. GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network completed a 10 year pioneering research project, documenting the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students with the release of *The 2009 National School Climate Survey*. The 2009 survey of 7,261 middle and high school students found that at school nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced harassment at school in the past year and nearly two-thirds felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation. Nearly a third of LGBT students skipped at least one day of school in the past month because of safety concerns. On a more local level, high school boys in Connecticut who were bullied about their perceived sexual orientation were four times more likely than other boys to have attempted suicide at least once within the last year (DPH, 2005).

I urge you to pass this legislation that would make schools more accountable for protecting its students and would create an environment where all students are safe to learn and be successful.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important legislation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Erin Smith, M.S.W  
860-247-6090