

Hello. My name is Jennifer Tyler and my daughter Bella Grace and I were headed to the hearing today when we experienced car trouble. We have no other way of getting there in time to give testimony, but we wanted to be sure you heard what we would have said because bullying has forever changed Bella and we want to do whatever we can to prevent it from hurting other children.

Bella Grace (who is only 7) wanted to speak and **"ask you to make some laws change so schools can't let kids bully because in my old school the kids who were bullied (like me) got the punishment and it makes me feel really bad. The teachers didn't protect me, and the principal didn't either. They were mean to me and my family when we told them what happened. I don't want that to happen to anyone else, especially little kids like I was. I was only 4, and it still hurts me every day. Thank you."**

Later when Bella started therapy she even created a mantra to remind herself that what the kids said wasn't true. It goes, "I'm not stupid. I'm not ugly. People don't hate me, people love me. I'm awesome and I'm cool. But most of all I am sweeeet!"

My 5 yr old had to tell herself that 20 times a day to try to convince herself that what the group of boys who bullied her in kindergarten (5 boys, sometimes more) said wasn't true.

I wanted to speak and tell you about the physical bullying and the assault that caused petechial hemorrhage (which is a lack of oxygen flow to the brain). She was diagnosed with PTSD at the age of 4 and we have found that while the physical scars are long gone, the emotional and psychological scars are still fresh and affect her daily at her new school and home.

Bella's actual bullying lasted less than a month. It was the response of the teacher, principal and other school staff that prolonged the trauma and still causes her to mistrust adults other than her parents 2 1/2 years later.

Our written testimony is included, and it outlines how the school's staff failed to protect her, failed to investigate when bullying was reported or discipline those involved, falsified state mandated bullying logs, lied to DCF when they were investigated for failure to protect Bella, lied again when they filed a false retaliatory report to DCF against me (which I was cleared of), blamed a 4 yr old for her own abuse and slandered her so it would seem like it was her fault, expelled Bella wrongfully, and caused extreme emotional distress to a child.

We can prove the school broke the current bully laws, but we have been told there is nothing to be done about this. So while we fully support S.B. 1138, we say go one step further.

We believe that this particular law is not enough. Any school that has the privilege of educating our children- whether public, private, charter etc. must also have the responsibility of following the law and protecting our children. Anyone found to break, disregard or skirt the law must be held accountable for doing so. Our children need to be protected and if there is anyone we should be able to entrust them to and expect their safety it is their teachers, principal and other school staff.

The emotional, physical and psychological toll bullying and her school's response to it took on my daughter should not be suffered on any child, whether in kindergarten or high school.

When your five year old says to you and her PTSD therapist that she understand why people want to hurt themselves and not live anymore because it just hurts so much what the mean people do to you at school than something has got to change.

I have kept every piece of documentation to back up what I say and it shows a fundamental problem with the bullying laws- they are not strong enough. We would welcome the opportunity to speak to anyone interested in solving the bullying epidemic in our schools.

Thank you,

Jennifer & Bella Grace Tyler

## **A Book About Meanness by Bella Grace**

*(Mama's note: This was written by Bella at 5 years old with her therapist after a year of specialized therapy for PTSD due to severe bullying beginning at age 4.)*

### **The First Day:**

The class sat and listened on the rug quietly. I was happy.

### **The Bad Day:**

Two of my friends were mean to me. They called me stupid, ugly and said everybody hated me. It made me so sad and then they made more boys say it so I thought it was all true.

### **The Day of Twist- My friends twisted my arm:**

*(The two boys started twisting each other's arms behind their backs very hard.)*

I tried to tell them that they cannot do that to each other but that is how they twisted my arm for being so upset with me. I felt very bad for myself and them. I was upset because that could hurt each other and others badly. Right after it happened I told the teacher about it but she didn't listen. When I told her the boys said it wasn't true, that I was just being bossy. My teacher said, "You're right, she is bossy." and walked away. That hurt my feelings so much! When I got the chance I told the principal but she didn't listen. This is why I ended up at *(my new)* school. Later that day the mean boys told my best friend to be mean to everybody else or they would be mean to him. *(The twisting was done in an attempt to break her arm so the boys could "take out" her brain. It continued for three more days with the teachers doing nothing to stop it.)*

### **The Pushy Day:**

The mean boys were playing and I offered to help them clean-up during clean-up time and one of the boys pushed me away. Then my best friend pushed me away. I felt sad and I hoped other people wouldn't be pushed by the mean boys. When I got the chance I told the teacher but she didn't listen to a word I said. She didn't believe me and she went on believing the mean boys and didn't get them in trouble. She said it was no big deal and almost acted like it was good. She let them go back to playing and she said to me that I shouldn't have told her. She sent me back to my seat. *(The "push" was so violently hard it caused a petechial hemorrhage- which is a lack of oxygen flow to the brain. Nothing was ever done to the boys or the teacher who ignored the assault.)*

### **The Sicky Day:**

Because of the mean boys pushing me I had to go to the hospital instead of going to school. At the hospital they took blood because they thought something *(might be)* wrong with it-and it was not fun! They wrapped a tie around my arm *(and)* on one end was a knot and on the other side I thought there was another knot, but it wasn't it was the thorn needle. It was completely not fun. IT WAS NOT FUN!!!!

### **The Scary Day:**

My Mama went in with me (*after an extended leave*) so that nothing bad could happen. My friend Jaden said he was going to kick my mother and me (*in the head*) and he almost did- he shot his leg up in the air. My other friends were being mean to me too because my mother was there. I felt bad because they weren't supposed to be mean to me. (*This was Bella's last day at that school and the day after her 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. We had to home school her for the next six months because she was too traumatized by everything to go back to school.*)

### **The Nervous Day:**

The next (*time*) that I went to school my mother took me to a meeting (*board meeting*). She said she had gone to the meetings before (*and*) no one listened but they (*might*) if I spoke. She said I didn't have to speak but could if I wanted. I did speak and when I spoke they all listened just like my mom said they would. I told them to fix the problem to stop the bullies from being mean. When I was about to speak my principal looked at me and she gave me a wink. I think the wink meant she did not want me to (*tell what she did and*) get her in trouble. (*Note: The board never did anything about the bullying or conduct of the school's employees.*)

### **I'm Not Stupid. I'm not ugly. People Love Me!:**

(*Bella Grace wrote a mantra to try to remind her that what the bullies said about her was not true. She used to say it all day long to convince herself. She still remembers it and uses it.*)

I used to think people didn't like me but now I know-

**I'm not stupid.**

**I'm not ugly.**

**People don't hate me, people love me.**

**I'm awesome and I'm cool.**

**But most of all I'm sweeeet!**

THE END

(*Mama's Note: Bella's book doesn't even begin to describe everything she went through at the charter school. The children bullied her, threatened her, assaulted her and intimidated her friends to join them in their torment of her. The school staff ignored, then bullied her and us and blamed a four year old for her own torture. After two and a half years she still suffers from PTSD. She has forever been changed by this experience. She will never go back to being the happy, healthy, confident, innocent little girl she was. They stole that from her. She learned at too young an age and too big a price how cruel this world can be. We can prove the school broke the current bullying law several different ways, but nobody has even been held accountable for their actions. Because of this the staff can continue to act in this manner. We have been told by many, many people that they do, and that Bella is not alone. That knowledge makes everything Bella went through so much worse. It has to stop. Bullying has to be stopped and those that allow it should not be allowed in our schools.*)