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Hello Chris,

I am contacting you on behalf of Logan West. She is the current Connecticut's Outstanding Teen and her platform issue is bullying. She has created her own anti-bullying initiative "Bully Proof"- Empowering Children Today to Prevent Bullying Tomorrow.

Logan was one of the student speakers at the Bullying forum with Kevin Jennings and would love to come and testify. Through sharing her story it becomes very evident that we need to make a change in how bullying is addressed in our schools.

I hope you will consider her to testify. Please feel free to contact me if needed. I am hoping to hear from you. If you would like Logan to be there please provide how to proceed.

Attached is a copy of the statement she made at the Bullying Forum with Kevin Jennings.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Marla Spadaccino

Business Manager for CT's Outstanding Teen

I am Logan West a 16 year old resident of Southington. My first experience with bullying was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade when I was 12 years old. I guess you would say that the reason that I was bullied was racially motivated. I am of mixed race, my mom is black and my dad is white and this is something that I am very proud of. However many of my peers did not see it this way. The black girls thought I wasn't black enough and the white girls thought I wasn't white enough. Being that my school and town are not very racially diverse I felt like that left me with a huge target on my back. I was essentially tortured for 2 years both in and outside of school. I remember a group of girls ganged up on me while I waited in the rain for the school bus to take me home. They were yelling obscenities, saying mean and nasty things and calling me names – mutt, half-bread bitch, little miss wanna be white, and others too painful to repeat. At the same time they kicked, pushed and shoved me and jabbed me all over my body with their umbrellas. I was scared, afraid and didn't know what do. I had become their punching bag. I didn't want to tell anyone because I didn't want the girls to find out and terrorize me even more.

I was invited to sleep over parties...I thought they would be fun and that these girls were trying to be my friend, but it only turned out to be fun for the girls who wanted to make fun of me. At one party they passed around magazines that had pictures of me modeling in them. When I looked at the pictures, my face had been purposely cut out of everyone! You could see the other models faces clearly in each picture – but my face was gone! That same night while I was sleeping someone cut off one of my braids. I woke up with a chunk of hair missing! It was horribly short, uneven and embarrassing. I looked and felt like a fool. I no longer had a hairstyle – I just had hair! I was so angry I cried for weeks. It was devastating to realize that these girls

didn't even consider me to be a real person- I was their trash.

The outside situations were easier to handle, I simply stopped going to social events. I didn't go to school dances, birthday parties, or join any school clubs. I even dropped out of our school dance team because I was too afraid that the bullies might be there too. I knew that I was missing out on what could have been great experiences. But I had to stay away because I couldn't take the chance of being the target of their rage.

What bothered me most is that I was bullied at school and from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade did not feel safe in a place where I am supposed to learn and flourish. I was verbally and physically abused on school grounds - tripped in hallways, pushed down the stairs and spat at on the school bus.

I was always taught that when you are in over your head you should tell an adult- and I did. I reported what was going on to my teacher and when it did not seem to be getting resolved I told my mother. She even called the school and spoke to the principal. They said they would try to address it but basically their hands were tied because of the way the laws were written. Apparently, meeting and discussing my situation with the school principal was not considered an "official complaint." Because my mom didn't make a written complaint - my situation was being ignored by school administrators. That same day that my mom called and talked to the principal the situation escalated- my bully punched me in the face. She always said "I'm gonna get you" and she did. I was shocked to be physically attacked in the school cafeteria while teachers and students looked on. I was even more shocked that on the same day I was abused, a girl in a Hartford school was sliced in the face with a box cutter by her bully. I had

originally felt alone, but once I heard someone else's story I instantly felt a bond with someone I had never met. I wasn't the only person being bullied, I wasn't the only target. As heartbroken as I was for what happened to me, I am thankful I didn't receive any physical scars. Mine are internal, forever inside of me and always reflected in the decisions I make, and the way I look at this world.

This did not have to happen. I know that the bully could have been stopped. During these two years of my life I lost myself and withdrew from my community.

I eventually realized that avoidance and withdrawal only stifles my growth. Now, I have decided to be an ally rather than a bystander so youth in my school can prevent bullying. We need to be proactive and ensure that all schools are required to include anti bullying programs in their curriculum. I am begging you to take this seriously so that children can feel safe in schools. You are the next step to stomping out bullying.