

Testimony to Education Committee Regarding SB #1138

My name is Nancy von Euler. I live in Southport, CT. Until this year, my children attended the Fairfield Public Schools. In the 12 years I had children in Fairfield schools I was an active parent volunteer, a member of PTA leadership, and frequently attended Board of Education meetings. I think it is fair to say that I have a high level of awareness of the district's issues and initiatives.

As a parent concerned with bullying in our schools, I attended a recent Fairfield Board of Education subcommittee meeting at which a revision to the district's bullying policy was being discussed. At the conclusion of the discussion, I had an opportunity to comment on how critically important I thought it was that the Board thoughtfully review its policies, procedures, and practices to insure that they reflected not just state and federal requirements, but also best practices. I handed out copies of the U.S. Department of Education's recent "Dear Educator" letter regarding bullying prevention policies and practices, as well the guidance from the Office of Civil Rights on districts' legal obligations when it comes to bullying and harassment. I followed up with a letter to the full board pointing out areas where the policy the Board was being asked to approve did not meet the standards included in both of those documents. When it came to a vote, the policy was approved as is. To my knowledge, this was done without any review of bullying incidents in the district; any parent or student surveying on school climate; any review of current best practice or model policies – in short, without any reflective process.

I share this to illustrate how vitally important it is that the state law be strengthened. As Kevin Jennings, Assistant Deputy Secretary and Head of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools said when he came to Connecticut recently to speak on the subject of bullying, "What gets measured, gets done." The bill you are being asked to consider significantly strengthens the requirement that the CT Department of Education and local districts not only implement better, more effective practices, but also that they measure, record, and report the impact of that work. Amongst the improvements are the requirements that districts engage important constituencies in bullying prevention planning and implementation; assign responsibility for this work within districts and schools; and report on progress. The bill charges the state Department of Education with the task of identifying and sharing model policies, plans, and training to increase the likelihood that local bullying prevention work represents best practices, not best intentions. These are important steps forward.

What this bill does not yet do is enumerate protected categories. Listing protected categories, such as race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, does not just protect these groups, but strengthens anti-bullying policies for all students. I am pleased to say that the policy revision that Fairfield approved in January **did** take this important step and Connecticut's law needs to follow suit. Doing so communicates clearly that in Connecticut we have a commitment to providing schools where *every* child feels safe, secure and respected.

When considering this bill, some of you will worry about adding an additional burden to already over-burdened districts; but the cost of not doing this bullying prevention work effectively is so much greater than the cost of doing it. The impact on school success, the

emotional scars, and, in the worst cases, the tragic loss of lives – you can't quantify those costs. We all know that the silent bystanders share some responsibility for the perpetuation of bullying; so you need to ask yourself – “Am I going to take a stand, or am I going to stand by silently?”

Nancy von Euler
92 Daves Lane
Southport, CT 06890
(203) 259-3239
pnoneuler@aol.com