

Testimony of Carmella Lorusso
Concerning Senate Bill 1139
An Act Concerning Planning in State Education Policy and
Assaults on Teachers

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Education Committee members.

My name is Carmella Lorusso. Today I am here to express support for **Senate Bill 1139**. I will speak to you first as an eighth grade teacher at Tisdale School in Bridgeport and second as the grievance chair for the Bridgeport Education Association (BEA).

In February of this year, after 25 years of teaching in Bridgeport, I personally experienced being assaulted by a student. It was first period on Monday morning and class had just begun. I was in front of the classroom waiting for the students to settle down when I heard a knock at the door. I had recently taken to keeping my door locked because I felt that I was being harassed by a student who was entering my room daily without permission. For two weeks prior to the incident, this student would come into my room when he should not be there and refuse to leave. He would disturb the class by calling out, moving around the room, throwing things at students, whistling, drumming on the desk, and trying to engage me in a verbal match. Each day I had to call for security to come and remove him. On a few occasions, he threw over desks and chairs took things from my desk, and threw markers and other things off the chalk ledge. He would often come to my door and pound on it until I called for security. Each time an incident occurred, I wrote a disciplinary referral to the office but there was no consequence for the student. On the day of the assault when I heard the knock on the door, I could see the security guard was there so I went to the door to open it. As I crossed the room, I did not notice that this very student was standing behind her. The guard said to me that she was bringing him to class. As I began to explain to her that the student was not in my class and should not be here, the student shoved me in order to enter the room, hitting me in the shoulder, chest and arm. Fortunately, I was not hurt physically and was able to maintain my balance.

I left the classroom and went immediately to the assistant principal's office. I found the principal and the assistant principal there. I explained what happened and reminded the assistant principal that I had sent daily referrals about the student and that I had verbally expressed my fears and concerns to her several times over the past two weeks. She acknowledged my statements and both she and the principal went to my room to retrieve the student. In the meantime, the second security officer had been called, but only the principal was able to get the student out of my room.

I went to the teacher's room. Shortly the assistant principal came in and I asked to have the police called. The assistant principal left the room and came back within five minutes to tell me that the principal said that I could not make a police report about the incident

because I was standing in the doorway blocking the egress. I was very upset. After a while I was able to go back to my classroom and teach.

During fourth period another teacher came into my classroom and told me that the student was placed back into the classroom and had just assaulted another teacher in the computer lab. The teacher had simply instructed the student to leave the YouTube site that he was not supposed to be on, and to go directly to do the research for his report. The student became enraged and threw a chair at her, hitting her in the leg. She immediately reported this to the principal, but there was no consequence to the student. After assaulting two teachers, the student remained with his class for the rest of the day. Again the teacher was denied the opportunity to call the police.

The next morning, I immediately went to the assistant principal's office to ask what the consequence was going to be for the student. She stated to me that she did not know of a consequence. I explained to her how I felt about the situation and she said that she would ask the principal about the consequence because he actually handled the situation. She came back to me in a quick fashion and told me that the student would be in ISS for the rest of the week. I agreed to this consequence. That day the student was absent from school; the next day he was in ISS. The day after that, I was absent from school and the student did not remain in ISS. On Friday, there was a meeting with the parents. No one had called his parents prior to the meeting; Friday was the first his parents knew of the assaults. In the end, the student served one day of ISS for shoving me and throwing a chair at another teacher.

As grievance chair of the BEA, I would like to share with you a few other stories of teacher assault but I would like you to understand that I do not know all of the stories because teachers are generally afraid to call the BEA. They fear retribution from the principal.

At Blackham School, paint was lobbed at a middle school teacher in the art room. The teacher was told by the principal that there was nothing that could be done because she does not have good classroom management. There was no attempt to investigate.

At Classical Studies School, a teacher was assaulted numerous times by a kindergarten child. She was punched, pushed, and had her arm scratched in several places necessitating emergency treatment. She was told that nothing could be done and she would have to wait until SRBI procedures were followed. After months of waiting and numerous other incidents, the teacher finally sought advice from my office. I advised her to call the police the next time the student hurt her. She followed through with that and the principal sent word to the teacher through others that she was not pleased.

At Central High School, teachers have been required to check student ID's as they enter the cafeteria. When a student unknown to the teacher showed up at the door without proper identification and the teacher asked the student to step aside for a minute, the student shoved the teacher knocking him over and hurting his arm. The teacher was told that he could not make a police report and the student did not receive a consequence.

At Bassick High School, a teacher was having a difficult time with a student and called security. The student, security officer and the teacher were in the doorway talking about the problem when the student suddenly became angry, grabbed the door and slammed it into the teacher. The teacher was hurt - she had soft tissue damage which required physical therapy. Another teacher witnessed the assault. Security was asked by both teachers to call the police and have the student arrested. The security guard would not do it. Once the assistant principal became involved, he, in conjunction with the principal, stopped the process. After several days and emails from the teacher to both the principal and the assistant, the teacher was called into the office for a meeting at that time she was told something to the effect of "We haven't had any arrests so far and we are not starting now." The police were not called.

There certainly are many more examples that could be included in this testimony. Just about everyday I or one of my colleagues hears of situation where a teacher has been threatened or hurt and nothing is done. The superintendent has stated many times that there is zero tolerance for assaults in the district. That statement is even included in the code of conduct booklet for the district; however, principals have also been told to keep the suspension rates down as well as the number of arrests.

Please support **Senate Bill 1139** because it will provide a means of enforcing a law that is supposed to require principals to file teachers' assault reports with the local police. As I have told you today, that simply is not happening and so the law must be fixed.

Thank you.