



Senate of Pennsylvania

Senator LeAnna M. Washington

4th Senatorial District

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 7, 2011
To: All Senators
From: Senator LeAnna M. Washington
Senator Lawrence M. Farnese, Jr.
Subject: Co-sponsorship request – Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights

In the near future, we will be introducing legislation modeled after New Jersey's "Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act." This will amend Act 61 of 2008, Section 6 with a more comprehensive and effective anti-bullying policy for Pennsylvania. The revised portion of the act will strengthen the standards and procedures for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying of students that occur in school and off school premises.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice and National Association of School Psychologists, bullying is a pernicious, pervasive behavior that is keeping as many as 160,000 children away from school each day. Bullying has lasting emotional effects on its victims and ultimately hinders learning and a positive school experience for thousands of Pennsylvania children. Current research suggests that school-based bullying is the most common form of violence in our society. The study declares that bullying and low-level violence affects approximately **20-30 percent** of our students on a daily basis.

The research indicates several consequences associated with bullying, which include depression, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse and an increased tendency to commit crime. Additionally, the study proclaims those students that partake in bullying without intervention are three times more likely to have at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24.

According to several news articles, Pennsylvania **ranks 4th highest** in the nation in its number of school bullying incidents.

Due to the fragile economic state of the Commonwealth, we must be fiscally responsible and take a smarter approach to fighting school bullying by ensuring that existing resources are better managed and utilized to make our schools safer for students.

In keeping with the aforementioned goal of fiscal responsibility and in an effort to minimize any additional burden placed on our school districts, this bill will call for existing personnel and resources to be used in every possible instance to accomplish the goals of increased prevention, reporting, and responsiveness to incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. This includes the appointment of school anti-bullying specialists and district anti-bullying coordinators.

Harassment, intimidation, and bullying are also problems on the campuses of our institutions of higher learning. By requiring our public higher education institutions include a specific prohibition against bullying in their student codes of conduct as well, we will take an additional significant step forward in reducing incidents of bullying behavior.

In 2010, the chronic persistence of school bullying led to student suicides across the country. By strengthening standards for preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents of bullying, this legislation will help reduce the risk of suicide and avert not only the needless loss of life, but also the tragedy that such loss represents to students' families and their communities.

To indicate your interest in co-sponsoring this important legislation, please contact Cindie Watkins in my office by calling 7-1427 or emailing cwatkins@pasenate.com.