



**Senator Sandra Williams  
21<sup>st</sup> Ohio Senate District**

**Committees:**

- Public Utilities – Ranking Member
- Ways and Means – Ranking Member
- Energy and Natural Resources
- Insurance and Financial Institutions
- Finance Subcommittee on Higher Ed - Vice Chair

**Senate Bill 196 Sponsor Testimony  
Judiciary Committee  
October 3, 2017**

Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 196.

Senate Bill 196 would create an aggravated bullying offense in the Ohio Revised Code which would be charged as a third-degree misdemeanor. The offense states that no person who is student of a public primary or secondary school shall knowingly cause another person who is a student of a public or secondary school to believe that the offender will cause serious physical or emotional harm to the person or property of the other person. The purpose of this bill is not to criminalize individuals but to form a deterrent and make sure they understand the seriousness of bullying and that the consequences should in fact be as serious as the effects.

Bullying has quickly become an epidemic in Ohio that negatively impacts not only children, but parents, teachers and the community. Bullying has serious adverse educational effects and students who are targets often experience extreme stress that lead to physical illness, reduced ability to learn, increased absenteeism and decreased test scores. Bullying often results in violent behavior, retaliation against the offender, harm to innocent bystanders and suicide. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention led a nationwide surveying effort, a section of that effort; The Ohio Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) found that, based on 2011-2013 YRBS data:

- approximately 21% of Ohio students have been bullied on school property in the past year;
- approximately 14% have been electronically bullied in the past year;
- and approximately 14% have been bullied away from school property in the past year;

While the threat of harsher penalties will not in itself deter people from bullying others; our hope is that the offender will weigh the costs and benefits of their behavior and will ultimately act in a way that maximizes acceptable behavior while minimizing emotional and physical pain against others.

I have been contacted by several families, who have school-age children in Senate District 21, about their children being constantly bullied and the effects it was having on their self-esteem, sense of security, and education. I met with local school officials, who informed me that they were limited in what they could do because of state law. A school refusing to take action because

of state laws, or lack thereof, is unacceptable. As a legislature, we must fight to ensure the safety of Ohio's students, both physically and mentally. Bullying behavior needs to be taken seriously. Concerned parents have responded to the bullying epidemic by asking schools and lawmakers to enact legislation for bullying deterrence and this is a response to their concerns.

Chairman Bacon and members of the committee, this concludes my testimony and I will be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.