

Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 360. Values-in-Action Foundation and its Project Love in-school anti-bullying initiative, which is in 57 Ohio counties in 205 public, charter and parochial schools, supports HB 360 and its efforts to curb bullying in Ohio's schools. According to a recent report from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, bullying is a "serious public health problem that has long-lasting effects on children." In 2015, the US Department of Education found that 21% of 12-18 year old students reported being bullied at school. That works out to more than 5 million children! In 2012, Psychology Today reported that, overall, 160,000 students stay home every day because they fear being bullied. Author Beth Rosenthal, in her 2008 book "Bullying" reported that teachers intervened to stop bullying only 25% of the time while they reported that they intervened 71% of the time.

The enormity of the problem that is revealed by these statistics begs state government to intervene to insist that schools take bullying seriously. HB 360 does just that by requiring schools to identify the bully while, at the same time, giving the bully and school ample time to seek intervention, counseling and other assistance. By identifying the bully, it also puts parents on notice to treat seriously the potential impact of their son or daughter being identified as a bully. Although this is not incorporated into the bill, my hope is that the bill will also encourage schools to seek outside programming assistance that programs students with values and social-emotional techniques that prevent and deter bullying.

Currently, Ohio schools are placing band aides on the bullying issue. Although a bullying-prevention program is mandated by the Ohio Department of Education, this is an unfunded (and as far as I can tell, largely unenforced) mandate. Consequently, schools are reporting that they are implementing serious programs, while these programs are not comprehensive and are in many cases really written procedures and/or suggestions implemented by teachers who have neither time nor expertise to properly instruct on this issue. While funding continues to remain an issue for schools, at least HB 360 will put schools and parents on notice that there will be serious consequences to the bully when bullying occurs. It is also essential that the bill requires schools to report and identify incidents even prior to the bully being identified. I have a concern that the schools will stonewall identifying the bully to protect the child that has been accused as long as possible, and that would defeat the true purpose of the bill.

Please proceed to recommend HB 360 to the legislature for passage. This bill will help make Ohio a better, safer and more grounded place to live, go to school and work. Often times, the bully continues his/her tactics into the workplace. According to the US Labor Department, one-third of the American workforce is bullied. So bullying even has significant work-related and economic-development related implications, as well.

Respectfully yours,



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