

Dear Members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee:

This statement is in support of House Bill 360. I write it from the perspective of an educator with 50 years of experience across the spectrum from teacher to superintendent and from administrative positions in traditional and community (charter) school environments. During my years as a school administrator in several K-12 schools, I have seen firsthand many examples of bullying by both males and females. I have seen bullies prey upon other students in both physical, emotional and now digital ways that have caused the victims irreparable harm including long term emotional and mental health issues.

Some say bullying has been around forever and is often just brushed off “as a part of growing up”, part of the workplace and other examples of this is just the way it is. The Ohio Revised Code has provisions dealing with bullying/hazing on the books for years with little implementation and enforcement. This bill puts additional enforcement and penalties into the law and raises a greater awareness of the magnitude of the issue.

The environment on many of our secondary schools and university campuses has caused a major change in our social conscience and societal mores. Recent examples of attacks and assaults in our schools have been found to be related to mental health issues and negative personal interactions. The changes proposed by this bill seek to make offenders more accountable for their actions and provides for behavioral changes with the community service provisions as part of the consequence for actions. Some critics state the community service and counseling provisions are too expensive and time consuming to implement. Thought should be given as to what is the residual cost of not implementing the proposed provisions. There is no remediation or behavioral change only a “punishment” and the behavior continues by the perpetrator and the behaviors usually get worse as they get older until there is a tragic incident and incarceration.

The community service component should be a “may” option especially for first offenders so behaviors can be changed early before behaviors become habitual. The bill should have some flexibility to be modified by local districts with programs developed by school based team or professional counselors.

Schools are designed to be centers for learning, part of the learning process is development of social interaction skills. Community schools especially, strive to develop a sense of community where emphasis is development of the whole child. Generally charter schools are smaller than traditional schools and greater individualization is or should be possible. A bill like HB 360 should encourage a greater commitment to the preventative aspects of bullying and hazing. The rehabilitative aspects of the bill appear to be designed to cause behavioral changes of those with potential for bullying and hazing actions. The costs of the program have to be weighed against the positive potential and preventative nature of future incarcerations. I feel an additional strength of the bill is the inclusiveness of those covered by the bill. It is not limited to just students but the entire educational organization.

Many fraternities have taken emphatic action with anti-hazing initiatives. A comprehensive stand against hazing and programs to prevent hazing supported by consistent consequences/punishments for violations will set the stage for significant change from high school through college.

If I may be of further assistance, I may be contacted by email or cell 330-606-0827.

Respectfully submitted

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