



**Senator Sandra Williams
21st 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 197 Sponsor Testimony
Education Committee
October 11, 2017**

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Education committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 197.

Senate Bill 197 will require a tiered disciplinary procedure for harassment, intimidation or bullying in school and to make willful harassment, intimidation or bullying of another student a third degree misdemeanor under certain circumstances. The bill will also require every school board to provide annual age-appropriate instruction about the prevention of harassment, intimidation, and bullying in school and about the board's policy, including written or verbal discussion of the consequences for violations. A 2013 study done by the Congressional Research Service found that on average, school-based anti-bullying programs decreased bullying behavior by 20%-23% and victimization by bullies by 17%-20%.

The several steps to address bullying are as follows:

1. Warning
2. Peer Mediation
3. Parent Meeting
4. In school suspension
5. Out of school suspension
6. Third-degree Misdemeanor

The last and final action in the tiered approach is a charge of a third degree misdemeanor primarily because the consequences should be as serious as the effects.

The offense states that no person who is a 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 meaningful intervention is taking place. Students and parents in our communities need to know that there are measures in place to responsibly handle their safety.

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. The goal of this legislation idea is prevention not punishment.

Bullying has quickly become an epidemic in Ohio that negatively impacts not only children, but parents, teachers and the community. A new term created to define this epidemic called, "bullycide," the act or an instance of killing oneself intentionally as a result of bullying. Suicide is the second, leading cause of death among teens. It is believed that 20% of teen suicides are related to teen bullying. For those teens who do not commit suicide there are other serious effects on their education. 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. According to the U.S. Dept. of Justice, 160,000 kids per day do not attend school for fear of being bullied.

I have been contacted by several families throughout the state 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.

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