



STUART MUSZYNSKI, PRESIDENT AND CEO, VALUES-IN-ACTION FOUNDATION
TESTIMONY IN FRONT OF THE STATE OF OHIO SENATE EDUCATION
COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 360, THE "BULLY BILL"

Honorable State Senators,

Just as an introduction, I represent Values-in-Action Foundation, an Ohio-based non-profit organization that specializes in character, values and anti-bullying training. Our programs are now in 64 Ohio counties and 47 states, representing almost 1000 schools and 300,000 students that will be trained this school year.

Most of us are well-aware of rhetoric that has advocated treating "the other" as the enemy. But, many of us are not aware that messages and tensions within society trickle down to our children and schools. Evidence from school principals, counselors and teachers and as reported by the Southern Poverty Law Center indicate that, as incivility increases, it impacts our schools. Incivility has affected how students talk to their peers, teachers and elders.

Bullying -- a subset of incivility -- is dramatically on the rise. Here are some startling numbers:

A recent study by the non-profit YouthTruth, based on interviews with 160,000 secondary students in 27 states, cites that bullying has increased from 28% to 33% from the 2015-16 school year to the present. Forty percent of middle schoolers and 27% of high schoolers also reported being bullied.

Higher rates of bullying were experienced at majority white schools: 36% of white students and 37% of students of color were bullied, the latter representing a 7% increase over the prior year. Bullying, racism and homophobia are inevitable partners.

In 2016, the National Crime Victimization Survey indicated that 21.8% of elementary schoolers were bullied.

In 2014, the American Psychological Association reported that "70% of middle and high school students have experienced bullying at some point". *Translation:* 38,500,000 students were bullied during their time in elementary, middle or secondary school!

A CDC study revealed that middle school students have the highest rate of bullying, at least once a week.

And, according to analyses by the U.S. Department of Education and psychologist Dr. Peter Langman, between 71% and 75% of school shooters have felt bullied, harassed or persecuted sometime prior to their incident.

Bullying is debilitating in our schools and society, not only for students, but in ongoing life. According to psyc.com.net, long-term effects of bullying include chronic depression, suicidal thoughts and plans, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-destructive behavior, substance abuse, and difficulty with relationships.

Like so many dysfunctions, solutions that once rested with families, parents, churches and fraternal groups now are handled through schools. Schools have become the “public squares” of many social issues.

However, schools intermittently and sometimes perfunctorily deal with or intervene with bullying. According to Author Beth Rosenthal, who wrote the book “Bullying,” students reported that teachers intervened to stop bullying only 25% of the time, while teachers reported that they intervened 71% of the time.

Why is there this disparity? My experience with schools tells me that many teachers just plain do not notice bullying. And, when they do, the victim may have retaliated against the perpetrator, and the perpetrator is wrongly labeled as the bully. Second, bullying may start at a benign level in the school and continue at a toxic level through social media.

Then there is the issue of teachers and administrators who don’t want to label the bully because they “come from a fine family” or they don’t want to rock the boat in the community.

And then there are the schools that don’t want the media to know that they have a bullying problem, so they kick the issue under the rug.

Which brings me to House Bill 360. For all the above reasons, government intervention is needed to bring the identification of bullies from a “nice to do” to a “need to do.”

That is why Values-in-Action Foundation supports House Bill 360. For all those who are bullied in Ohio, for Chagrin Falls, Ohio resident Marissa Eason whose father had to take her out of her public high school and place her (at great expense) in a private high school because the district continued to tolerate or ignore her being bullied, and for the 8-year-old Cincinnati boy who in 2017 committed suicide because he couldn’t take being bullied anymore, we all need to take action.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stm" with a small smiley face above the "m".

STUART MUSZYNSKI
President and CEO
Values-in-Action Foundation