

Dear Members of the Senate Education 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. A survey conducted in 2014 by the Center for Disease Control/Violence Prevention revealed the following statistics:

- 1 out of 4 teens are bullied (this is even higher for gifted students, in traditional schools, because they are different)
- 9 out of 10 LGBTQ students experienced harassment at school and online
- 5.4 million students stay home on any given day because they are afraid to be bullied
- 1 out of 5 kids admit to being a bully, or doing some kind of “Bullying”
- 43% fear harassment in the bathrooms at school
- A poll of teens ages 12-17 proved that they think violence increased at their schools
- 282,000 students are physically attacked in secondary schools each month
- Every 7 minutes a child is bullied on a playground
- 43% of have been bullied online
- 35% of kids have been threatened online
- 21% of kids have received mean or threatening emails or other messages

The Ohio Revised Code has provisions dealing with bullying/hazing on the books for years with little implementation and enforcement. This bill puts additional reasonable enforcement and penalties into the law and raises a greater awareness of the magnitude of the issue. The emphasis to continue a student’s education while under disciplinary action maintains academic continuity and hopefully, encourages a student to “learn from their mistakes” while having meaningful consequences.

The environment not just in many of our secondary schools and university campuses but at the national and even international governmental levels has caused a major change in our social conscience and societal mores. Recent examples of attacks and assaults in our schools, synagogues, churches and public places have been found to be related to mental health issues and negative personal interactions. The changes proposed by this bill seek to make offenders, at an early age, 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. What is the cost, not in just dollars but in human lives? 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. A greater emphasis on the social emotional development of students should be encouraged. Programs like Mindfulness, Positive Behavior Intervention and Responsive Classroom should be incorporated into school programs. Community schools especially, strive to develop a sense of community where emphasis is on the 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 programs have to be weighed against the positive potential and preventative nature of future incarcerations or worse yet deaths. I feel an additional strength of this bill is the inclusiveness of those covered by the bill. It is not limited to just students but the entire educational organization and should have a ripple effect on the entire community.

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

Respectfully submitted,

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