

41ST HOUSE DISTRICT

LUCAS COUNTY

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Vice Chair Criminal Justice,
Higher Education, Primary and
Secondary Education, Economic
and Workforce Development



State Representative Joshua E. Williams
Ohio House of Representatives

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Fowler-Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 216.

To address the problem of bullying and the associated rise of suicide in Ohio, this body required schools to adopt anti-bullying policies in ORC 3313.666. With the increased use of social media and online digital harassment, the problem of bullying has become almost inescapable for many students, who are unable to avoid bullying from peers in their own homes. In 2012, the General Assembly updated the statute to require schools to include provisions that address digital forms of harassment in their anti-bullying policy.¹ Yet, the rate of suicide has continued to climb. As of 2021, suicide is the 2nd highest cause of death for children aged 10-14.²

Part of the problem is that schools are not enforcing their own anti-bullying policies. Just this past spring, a 15 year-old student from Tuscarawas County took his own life after a sustained period of bullying, both at school and online, related to his medical condition.³ In Fort Wayne, Indiana, a 10 year-old student's parents

¹ <https://publicfiles.ohiosos.gov/free/publications/SessionLaws/129/129HB-116.pdf>

² <https://mha.ohio.gov/about-us/media-center/news/pr-05-12-2023-odh>

³ <https://www.jordanmiller.news/2024/08/13/words-matter-tuscarawas-co-family-mourns-loss-of-son-15-who-died-by-suicide-following-cyberbullying-incident/>

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contacted the school over 20 times about bullying incidents before their son took his own life ⁴ The General Assembly has a responsibility to protect the children of our state and provide a safe and welcoming environment at school so our students can learn. This can only be accomplished by requiring schools to enforce their own anti-bullying policies.

The best way to ensure that schools enforce their policies is to empower students who have been bullied and their parents. House Bill 216 requires the Department of Education and Workforce to develop a process by which a student, a student's parent or guardian can request an investigation to determine whether the school is in compliance with its policy. Upon receiving a request, DEW will conduct an investigation and offer the student a chance for a hearing.

Under current law, parents and students have no recourse if their complains of bullying are not taken seriously by the administration. This legislation will make schools accountable to students, parents, and their own anti-bullying policies.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation, I welcome any questions form the committee.

⁴ <https://www.21alivenews.com/2024/05/13/10-year-old-boy-dies-by-suicide-parents-blame-school/>

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