

BE A S.M.A.R.T. PARENT DAY

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Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 315, which would designate the sixth day of October as “Be a S.M.A.R.T. Parent Day”. Essentially, this day would remind parents to be a guiding force in their children’s social media use in an effort to deter cyber bullying. I will explain this day in more detail momentarily. However, first I would like to share with you my personal experience with bullying.

Early in high school, like most teenagers, I had access to social media through my cell phone. One social media application in particular allowed people to ask me questions anonymously. Initially, the questions were typical teenage commentary; for example, “who do you think is the cutest boy in the school?” Very quickly, the questions turned to harassing statements. “No one likes you.” “No one wants you to go to this school.” “Just go kill yourself.” Not knowing the source of these comments made walking the hallways of my high school excruciating. I became so depressed that I would not get out of bed. My mother would physically dress me and force me to go to school. At my lowest point, I told my parents I didn’t want to live anymore. Fearing I would harm myself, they arranged their work schedules so that I was never left alone. My little sister said she didn’t even recognize me anymore.

After months of feeling this way, I received counseling and began journaling. I noticed in my writing there were three things that I kept writing about that made me feel better. Talking to Someone, Blocking Hurtful Words out of my head and heart and Helping Others. This became a strategy to cope with the pain of bullying. I called the strategy TBH. I shared this strategy with thousands of children at state anti-bullying conventions, on the television network TLC , and even with former Secretary Hillary Clinton.

While helping children overcome the pain of bullying was important to me, I truly wanted to prevent bullying from happening in the first place. It occurred to me that children are handed technology at a very young age, with little supervision or instruction. In an effort to deter cyberbullying, I developed “Be a S.M.A.R.T. Parent Day” as a reminder to parents that they must be the guiding force in their child’s social media use. The acronym “S.M.A.R.T.” stands for Social Media Awareness (know the applications that your child is using and the purpose of the applications), Respect (teach your child to respect not only his/herself but others when using social media), Timing (establish technology timeouts and emphasize face-to-face communication is the best communication).

I presented this day to the Erie County, Ohio Commissioners and received an official proclamation to make October 6th “Be a S.M.A.R.T. Parent Day” in Erie County. In our community, businesses change their signs to “Be a S.M.A.R.T. Parent Day”, flyers go home with students reminding parents to be “S.M.A.R.T.” and newspapers and radio stations remind the community of the importance of this day.

I am passionate about making this a statewide day in Ohio, thereby encouraging community participation and collaboration with schools and non-profit agencies. I hope to, one day, see this as a national day with Ohio being the lead state. Again, Chairman Uecker and the Members of the Committee, thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony on House Bill 315. I am happy to answer any questions the committee might have.