



**Senator Sandra Williams
21st Ohio Senate District**

**Senate Bill 144 Sponsor Testimony
Judiciary Committee
September 18, 2019**

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 144.

Senate Bill 144 will require a tiered disciplinary procedure for harassment, intimidation or bullying in school and make these a third degree misdemeanor under certain circumstances. The bill will also require every school board to provide annual age-appropriate instruction about the prevention these actions in school and the board's policy. The instruction must also include written or verbal discussion of the consequences for violation of instructions. 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 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 primary 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. According to the 2017 School Crime Supplement (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice), about 20% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying¹. Bullying affects all youth, including those who are bullied, those who bully others, and those who see bullying going on. Some effects may last into adulthood. Students who experience bullying are at increased risk for poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression.² According to the Center for Disease Control, students who bully others are bullied, or witness bullying are more likely to report high levels of suicide-related behavior than students who report no involvement in bullying.³ Bullying often results in violent behavior, retaliation against the offender, harm to innocent bystanders and suicide. According to The School Crime Supplement of 2017 to the National Crime Victimization Survey, about six percent of students reported avoiding school activities or classes because they were fearful that someone might attack or harm them⁴. This is one percent increase from the results gathered in The School Crime Supplement of 2015.

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.

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

¹ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/ind_10.asp#f52

² <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-factsheet508.pdf>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-suicide-translation-final-a.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/iscs18.pdf>