

SB 144

My name is LaKisha Jefferson (Organizer of a local Community Coalition “#Ctrl...weAlt2Delete,” in the City of Columbus). I am a proponent of SB144- To create the offense of aggravated bullying, a third degree misdemeanor. Bullying has become a significant problem over the past decade. Regardless of the source of reference highlighting statistics, the numbers suggest that it’s more likely than not that a child will either be the target or the instigator of bullying.

Schools have turned to preventative programs and policies, in efforts to seek solutions, to no avail. Approval of SB144 is taking a step in the right direction, because if one doesn’t learn accountability then he/she cannot become productive, law abiding citizens.

I respectfully asks, as legislators continue to vet through SB144, that consideration is given to incorporate mental health screenings and resources for bullies who exhibit sufficient symptoms to qualify for a mental health diagnosis. Studies often find that bullies are bullied too and that aggressive tendencies are the result of learned behaviors.

With respect to the proposed disciplinary procedures, it’s important to engage parents, as early as the first offense, with a written warning signed off by a parent or guardian. Regarding the proposed disciplinary procedure for the third offense, I respectfully ask legislators to consider implementing an all inclusive meeting forum with all parties (both parents and students) involved in an effort to align on a plan to potentially repair or preserve severed relationships between students going forward. Often as leaders and professionals, we work with difficult people however, we learn to strategize through challenges to better manage risky situations. We must provide this exposure to the youth as a developmental tool in handling crucial interactions.

Lastly, if/when a fourth offense arise we should definitely treat the matter as a call for concern. Special consideration should be given as to whether a referral is needed for a mental health screening or for other social services to improve the well-being of individuals. It’s important that we first establish mental competency to stand trial prior to convicting students with an offense of aggravated bullying, a third degree misdemeanor.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

LaKisha S. Jefferson