

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 360 – Ohio Anti-Bullying and Hazing Act
Before the Education and Career Readiness Committee on Tuesday, March 13th, 2018**

Chair Lehner, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 360, The Ohio Anti-Bullying and Hazing Act.

My name is Melanie Moore, and I am the mother of a child who has been a victim of both emotional, and physical bullying that has left him both emotionally, and physically scarred.

It was very important to us as parents to build a good strong foundation for our son. He attended a Christian pre-school for 2 years to prepare him academically as well as socially, for public school. It was at his first parent teacher conference in kindergarten that his teacher said to us, "What can I say about Will, he is such a happy kid!! He has wonderful manners, and he is so funny!" I never knew just how much her words meant to me, until I realized one day, after he had endured years of bullying, that he was no longer that happy kid anymore.

My son did not have any outward distinctions that would cause him to stick out from the others to be targeted for bullying. He dressed well, he was intelligent, and fit in with the rest of the middle school students. He played on the basketball team. He was complimented for being well mannered, following the rules, and always willing to help out. One of the elementary school teachers described him as a child who "Just goes with the flow", and she said he was just a joy to be around. He was a parent's dream, and he made us very proud! All of that was soon to change, and that was due to the ongoing bullying that went, unanswered, ignored, undisciplined, and not taken seriously enough by the school.

In August, 2016 a boy named Evan, whom my son knew of walked up to him in the busy hallway while the 6th grade classes were changing, and spit a large amount of phlegm/mucous directly on to the middle of my son's face in front of his peers. Several student's witnessed it, and in fact one of them took the time to walk to the restroom with him. He was mortified, scared, humiliated, and grossed out. He hurried to his next class fearing he'd be late, and he reported it to his teacher. This same teacher ends up participating in name calling with her 6th grade students later in the year. She tells him to go to the office to report it. The assistant principal doubts what my son says, and sends him back to class. I never received a phone call, an email, or any other notice from the school that this had happened to my son. When his Father picked him up from school that day, our son told him what had happened, and his father promptly called the school, and asked for a meeting with the principal. He went in to the school the next morning, and he met with the assistant principal, who tried to deny it ever happened. He asked her to review the video from the cameras that are in the hallways, and what do you know, there it was, Evan spitting in our son's face. She said she would handle it after his Father stated that his best buddy is a Canton Police officer, and said that spitting in someone's face is considered an assault. We trusted that this would be handled by the school, but in fact the student bragged that he got away with it, and would do it again!

Well, Evan just happened to play on the basketball team too, and there was a game coming up where they would be on opposing teams. Evan had started taunting, and threatening my son at school saying he was going to try to physically hurt my son during the game, and make it look like it was part of the game play. I read the rules for the basketball team, and it stated that whatever discipline took place in

school stood the same for the basketball team. Unruly behavior, poor grades, etc. would not be tolerated. I texted my son's coach as to what had happened, and what Evan was threatening to do to my son. The then reported it to the president of the league who acknowledged it, said he spoke to Evan, but that was it, nothing was done. On the day of the game my son was overwhelmed with anxiety and fear, to the point I could hear the bleachers rattle from him trembling in fear. After to speaking to some parents at the game that day I found out that Evan was being raised by his Grandmother, one of his parents is deceased and his other parent is incarcerated. He had brought marijuana to school in 5th grade, and it was found in his locker. It was obvious to me that Evan was getting away with a lot, and maybe it was out of sympathy for his home situation. I believe If the HB 360 were in place at the time, the recommended counseling, or intervention, could have possibly helped him deal with his home situation, and allowed him to vent to an adult, rather than taking his anger, jealousy, and rage out on another student.

In early February, 2017 I received a call while at work from the assistant principal, and her first words were, "First of all he's okay" in a very quiet voice. She went on to explain that my son had been put in a headlock from behind and thrown to the floor by another student. She said the school nurse checked him over and he was fine. I asked who the other student was, and she said she couldn't tell me, but my son could when I see him after school. I asked if it was the same boy who had spit in his face, who threatened to harm him during basketball season, and she said she could not tell me. I just knew in my heart that it was Evan. I called his Father to tell him of the assault, and my son told him the details. He said he was standing in the classroom talking to 2 girls during free time, and that the teacher had left the room and was talking to another teacher with her back towards the classroom, when Evan came up from behind him and wrapped his arm around his neck, put him in a choke hold, pulled back on his head and threw him to the concrete floor. The other teacher that was facing the classroom witnessed the assault and got my son's teacher's attention and told her what just happened. When she asked Evan why he did it, he replied. "I don't know?" I was not told if there were any consequences given to Evan.

The bullying by Evan continued, and there was another incident from another student that made a negative impact on our son. It was in January of 2017, my son was waiting outside during parent pick up. A boy began drawing something on my sons arm with permanent marker. The kids had been writing on their knuckles, etc. My son saw that the boy had drawn a vulgar picture on his arm He said to him, "Hey dude, what are you doing?!!", and the boy took the black permanent marker and began frantically marking all over my son's prized Michael Jordan white t-shirt. His Father witnessed the whole thing take place, opened his car door, and demanded that the boy tell him his parent's phone number. He provided the number, and he was told that the school would be notified of the incident. He contacted the mother, sent pictures of the vulgar drawing her son had put on our son's arm, and the ruined shirt. She stated it was an accident, and offered to pay for the shirt. He explained that the cost of the shirts was not his concern. He had already left a message on the vice principal's voice mail immediately. The vice principal called him and said she would speak to the student regarding the incident. She spoke to him, he said it was an accident, and there were no consequences for this boys inappropriate actions.

It got to the point that my son did not feel safe during school hours. A student named Logan had his front teeth knocked out, and the bully said it was an accident. The victim agreed and said it was an accident, but had told my son he was too afraid to tell on the bully because he would "get him again!" The student who did the bullying was actually expelled from a Canton City school for the same behavior. He had knocked another boys head into a brick wall at recess, our school was told about it, and yet the bully went without any consequences. Another student was put in a headlock in the restroom, so it was

not a safe place to be if you are being bullied. The teachers were trying to keep them separated at lunch, and recess.

In the meantime, all of the stress he was under started manifesting physically, and emotionally. He began having trouble sleeping, which led to not being able to pay full attention at school, which led to his grades slipping for the first time. He lost 4 lbs. in a month from not eating due to the stress and anxiety he had, knowing he was not going to be protected at school by the teachers, the principal, assistant principal, or the recess monitors who were not allowing him to hang out with the so called "bad kids" who were his protection against the bullies.

He was made fun of for having his hair a little long, so he insisted on getting it cut short. He was then made fun of by his classmates by stating he looked like a grandma with his hair cut, and they called him Betty White. The teacher had him stand in front of the class to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and he got so nervous and felt humiliated that he forgot the words, the kids laughed, the teacher called him a liar when he said he couldn't remember because he was nervous. That day when he left her classroom she said, "See ya Betty White!" as he walked out of the classroom.

After several other incidents, and speaking to the teachers, the assistant principal, the principal, and getting absolutely no help, from any of them, I called the Superintendent of Perry Local Schools, Mr. Scott Beatty. I left him a voice mail stating I needed to speak to him regarding an ongoing bullying situation. I did not get a call back, so I waited a few days and called and left a second message. I never got a call back. I then emailed him stating I would like to have a meeting regarding the severe bullying that had been ongoing for over 2 years, and that unfortunately the faculty, and administration were part of it, so taking the proper chain of command was not working. I got nothing back. On Tuesday, 2/21/17 I walked into the administration office with my then 11 year old son and asked to see Mr. Beatty. I was told he was not in, so I handed his administrative assistant the necessary paperwork to withdraw my son from Pfeiffer intermediate School. She tried to send me elsewhere, a place on 38th St., and I explained that the law states that I need to turn this in to the Superintendent. She argued with me and said, "I deal with this all the time, I know what I'm doing!" I replied, "Really? That is just sad." Thinking that if she has to deal with this all of the time there must be a reason that parents are choosing to withdraw their children from Perry Local Schools.

Over the next year, my son was suffering from severe headaches that were accompanied by a popping sound, a warm feeling of fluid trickling down above his ear, one half of his tongue would go numb, and he would suffer a sharp shooting pain on one side of his head. It took over a year of going to the medical doctor who referred him to an ENT, back to the MD, then referred to a neurologist at Akron Children's Hospital. He asked if my son had ever suffered a head trauma, and he had, the headlock/chokehold incident. He had my son show him what had happened and he knew immediately what it was. The proper name is neck tongue syndrome. (The **neck-tongue syndrome**, consisting of pain in the **neck** and altered sensation in the ipsilateral half of the **tongue** aggravated by **neck** movement, has been attributed to damage to lingual afferent fibers travelling in the hypoglossal nerve to the C2 spinal roots) This is something he may have to suffer his entire life with. To watch his eyes get big, wince in pain, hear his speech effected by the tongue going numb, and see him suffering is heartbreaking.

We, as a family are left trying to fill in all of the cracks that the bullying has caused. From 2nd grade on, it was day, after day, after day, after day, of tearing down his self- esteem, feeling

helpless, and unheard. It was slowly breaking him down to feel like he was not worthy of someone to care enough about him, to do something to help him feel safe at school so he could get an education. I felt like he was drowning, and I had that split second to grab his hand and pull him out, or I was going to lose him forever. I don't know if I will ever see that same light in his eyes that he had before he was emotionally bullied, physically assaulted, mistreated by his classmates, the faculty, and the administration.

What I just cannot understand is that schools are stepping up their security, as they should, to try protect our children better than they have in the past due to all of the recent school shootings. If a child tried to bring a gun, or a knife, or drugs, etc. into the school to try to harm the other students, or faculty, they would be disciplined accordingly, but they are allowing our children to be harmed, sometimes on a daily basis, by their fellow students, and at times faculty members, with another weapon of choice, and that weapon is bullying. You may not see the immediate effects of what this weapon can do, but believe me, they are there! They are cracking, and slowly wearing away at the foundation that we as parents have worked so hard to build up from the start of our children's lives.

I support Representative Dave Greenspan's House Bill 360 anti-bullying anti-hazing Act one hundred percent, and if this bill had been in effect when my son attended Perry Local Schools, my son, and our entire family's lives would be so very different from what they are today! What my son had to endure on a daily basis because there were no consequences to the bullying is unfathomable. I am so very thankful that my son and I have an amazing ability to communicate, and that he felt safe enough with me to express how he was feeling, and what was causing him to feel that way. When talking to a lot of parents, and reading posts from parents, and relatives of children who have been severely bullied from Perry Township, Plain Twp., Massillon City, Louisville, they all agree that something needs to change immediately before more children's lives are effected forever, and God forbid they feel like they have no other way than to take their own life. While teen suicide is a very sensitive subject, I have been in touch with some family members who have suffered a loss recently from suicide, and they have stated publicly that bullying that went ignored, or not being taken seriously enough, was a huge factor.

We need to hold the schools accountable, to hold the bullies accountable, and to deter them from ever even thinking about bullying a 2nd time. If the schools have the right to discipline our children as they see fit during school hours, then they should also be protecting them and keeping the safe from harm. Our children have the right to a public education, to know that they are being heard and to feel safe.

I thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of my son, and my entire family who have all been effected by this.