

2/8/08

The Honorable  
Florida State House of Representatives  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Dear Representative ???:

I am writing as a certified school psychologist, university trainer, mother, and constituent to ask for your support of the Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act (HB 669) addressing the issue of harassment and violence within our schools. This bill, if passed, takes a much needed step in the direction of creating a safer learning environment for all children in Florida's public schools.

Schools should provide a safe haven that inspires learning and exploration for students. School environments that promote a sense of community, responsibility, and belonging establish a healthy and safe climate where learning outcomes can be achieved. Currently, our schools are in a state of crisis. In a recent report surveying students' perceptions of their school climate, results indicated that less than half of the Florida students surveyed reported feeling very safe and almost one tenth of the students reported feeling not safe at all while in school. Over two-thirds of students report that schools are not effective in their response to bullying and one-fourth of teachers do not believe bullying is a problem and thus intervene in only about 4% of cases.

Bullying activities vary among gender, ages, and practices; however, most children are impacted by this behavior at some point in their academic careers. Bullying has been named a key factor in school related deaths and bullying behavior can lead to criminal behavior in later life. About 85% of bullying victims suffer long-term psychological damage. Bystanders are impacted by seeing persons in their environment harassed without mercy and struggle to make sense of how to help. This problem is affecting a majority of the children in our schools and must be addressed with urgency. It has only been made worse by access to technology and opportunities for bullies to extend the harassment beyond school hours.

HB 669 will require each school district to adopt a policy prohibiting bullying and harassment, thus protecting students during school, all educational programs and activities, on buses, and through computer systems accessed through educational institutions. I urge you to support HB 669 to ensure that our Florida students are afforded the opportunity to learn in a safe environment which maximizes their potential for academic and social growth.

Sincerely,