

Testimony for JUD 2/17/2011 2:00:00 PM HB688

Conference room: 325

Testifier position: support

Testifier will be present: No

Submitted by: Kayla Avega

Organization: Associated Students of Kalaheo High School

Address:

Phone:

E-mail: kaylaavega17@gmail.com

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LATE TESTIMONY

Comments:

Hi, my name is Kayla Avega; I'm currently a junior of Kalaheo High School and I'm a member of the student council (ASK). I strongly believe in this bill and ask for your support. With bullying happening nationwide, many students who are bullied, end up thinking life's not worth it and want to go suicidal. That is why with this bill it'll help those students in need of help and to stop those who are bullying others.

I really believe that with this bill it'll let the department of education know that this is a serious case that happens to students a lot. Also, students have a hard time letting others know that they need help because they feel that if they say something, that the person who bullies them will do something ten times worse to them. I believe the way to notice that our students are being bullied is by noticing that students that are depressed, academic issues, and low self-esteem. The reason students are getting bullied is because there isn't much supervision happening around the schools. Bullies usually do stuff to students when the adults aren't paying attention which I believe needs to be fixed ASAP.

It's known that students that are bullied is harassed verbally, threaten, being a target of rumors, and beaten up. By knowing all of these I believe that the DOE should maintain and enforce a stop to bullying. Hawaii School Health survey taken in February of 2010 51 percent feel harassed and bullied in school, while 32 percent are harassed and bullied through the internet. It's known that 1.7 million U.S. students from grades 6-10 are being bullied everyday and it increases day by day. With this bill I know that with your support you'll be able to help the students from getting bullied, harassed, and cyber bullied.

Thank you so much for your time and I hope that you'll take action and support of HB688.

Testimony IN SUPPORT of HB688

February 17, 2011

Paige Calahan
PO Box 1380
Puunene, HI 96784

LATE TESTIMONY

Representatives,

Thank you for considering this important piece of legislation.

I am a domestic violence survivor. My son is still a victim. This legislation is important because bullying and cyber-bullying is a tool used by perpetrators of domestic violence to manipulate others and it is a behavior that abusers teach and children learn.

My son attended Carden Academy on Maui. He was in Tammy Donner's third grade class. Ms. Donner allowed my son to be bullied. She was negligent and also manipulated by my very convincing Ex. Most teachers are not educated about the signs of DV or the dynamics of an abusive relationship. My son confided in me. He said his teacher didn't see the bullying. He said it was because was not the "important kid" in class.

I visited the class. We were just a few months into our divorce and I expected my Son was having problems adjusting. I wanted to observe his interactions throughout the day. What I observed was shocking. Ms. Donner didn't watch or care where my son went throughout the day. He wandered the campus, staying away from the bullies. He often ended up in the fifth grade class (he was in 3rd grade), where he interacted well and was supervised by that teacher. Ms. Donner was unaware he was gone. When there was bullying, she not intervene.

During playtimes I witnessed my son being bullied by other students, one was a "board member's" child and another a teacher's child. I spoke to Ms. Donner and she said she would look into it. This is where domestic violence comes more openly into the issue and why it's important to stop bullying.

Ms. Donner began corresponding with my ex. I became aware when I found a note hidden in my son's backpack. It was personal and was helping my ex to circumvent court ordered visitation days/times at school. When brought to the school's attention, the teacher was "talked to" and she became very angry at being exposed. She became hostile towards me though I did nothing. She allowed herself to be unknowingly manipulated by a convincing perpetrator of DV. This inappropriate empathy morphed into a relationship between the teacher and my ex that my son described as "dating". What was actually happening was that my ex was spending time with the single person who spent all day with my son. He fed her stories and lies and this successfully convinced the teacher I was harmful to my son. It made her ultra-sensitive to anything and everything involving me. THIS harmed my son who is very attached to me. He was

treated as “less than”, and the bullying was ignored. Ms. Donnor’s unsubstantiated statements were brought into court and used against me. This was a huge factor in custody change. Again, THIS harmed my son.

As the teacher’s behavior and the bullying continued, my son began acting out, refusing to go to class and it became quite a multi-step process to get him there. He began alleging sexual abuse by his father, his problems became worse, and the bullying persisted. The school would not intervene because of their “not taking sides” policy. The school and the teacher isolated me away from the “process” because my ex spoke so negatively about me. His behavior was awful when they supported me. The school over-reacted, refused to support my son, myself or my ex after my ex threatened legal action if they did. This escalated against me and my son was expelled. After multiple letters and motions into the court by my ex and a GAL that was not present or able to recall conversations with me, the school administrator wrote a letter and made clear to the court that my ex was not telling the truth and that this was hurting my son. This was ignored entirely by Judge Keith Tanaka. My son’s behavior escalated. I was restrained from any contact with school and my time with my son heavily reduced. All school contact was removed based on how Carden Academy handled threats from my ex. My son was taken from me and put in a private school 3 weeks after the new term started. Keith Tanaka complied with my ex’s request to withhold my son from school while he looked for a more “acceptable” school. I was custodial parent and I had registered my son in school months before this drama. The bullying ended in the new school but the abuser’s control (of my son and myself) continued at 100%. This has not ended.

All of the above happened at Carden Academy even though the school KNEW they had called the police to remove my ex. He was escorted off campus when he interrupted graduation ceremonies so he could take my son out of graduation ceremonies in violation of a TRO. My understanding is that he was armed at the time. Immediately prior to this I was hosting classroom parties, attending every function (my ex did not) and I was one of the parents all the kids (and teachers) wanted to see.

Bullying, cyber or otherwise, is a tool of domestic violence abusers. This behavior was present in our home and it worked its way into my son’s school. My son was a victim, not a bully. He was a victim at school, by the kids, teacher and his father. He learned (at home and school) what happens if you resist. Control, manipulation and how others view them is a tool of abusers. Correction of this behavior at school would have supported my son. It would have empowered him and made him feel safe. He would have wanted to go to school and would have stopped the ex and teacher from ganging up on me. By allowing it to continue it has destroyed my son, and made him motherless.

Please stop bullying at school and please take it very seriously. It would have helped us if someone had stopped it then. Domestic abuse does not just happen at home!

Respectfully,

Paige Calahan, Mother of an abused child

LATE TESTIMONY

My name is Shannon Takamatsu, the mother of TJ-Reilly Takamatsu and would like to share with you what it was like to be a parent of a child who was a victim of bullying and everyday harassment.

My child faced many challenges throughout his life. He was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth. From the beginning, I witnessed my son struggle and fight to do things that we would normally take for granted. He has faced every obstacle with his head held high and a bright smile on his face.

He strived to be like all the other children his age and accomplished that goal academically. TJ went from a fully loaded individualized educational plan with goals for physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech, and education to a student who attended all general education classes with accommodations in a 504 plan.

My son was always an inspiration to me; he fought and struggled through numerous surgeries and challenges with a very optimistic outlook thinking he could do anything.

All that changed when he was faced with the challenges of his peers. The constant torment and harassment became too much for him to bear. I noticed a change in him that broke my heart. I saw a confident, happy, outgoing young man become someone who was sad, reserved and ashamed of himself. This change was due to the abuse he endured in a place that was supposed to be safe.

When TJ informed me of the torturous abuse he faced every day, I went to speak to his counselor. She tried to rectify the problem with a contract between my son and the main instigator, but the negative abuse continued. I met with the counselor, vice principal, and the school's behavior health specialists in attempts to stop others students from harming my child. All of these actions failed.

After seeing how badly the actions of others had a grave effect on my son, I had to make a choice; we could fight the situation at the cost of my sons emotional and mental well-being, or choose to withdraw from the everyday torture and anguish he endured at school.

I am lucky enough to be a single mother, raising three children to have the support of my family and quit my job to homeschool my child.

Please understand that those days that my child suffered because of others choosing to make him a target for this abuse can never be replaced, nor can the damaging effect be erased. Bullying and harassment by other students has robbed my son of his freedom and rights to attend a public school.

I urge you to pass this bill to allow students like my child to have a chance to enjoy his childhood in school amongst his peers. Thank you for allowing me to share our story and I hope that our experience can help you understand the plight we faced and prevent others from enduring the same.

My name is TJ-Reilly Takamatsu, I am 13 years old. I am an 8th grader that use to attend Central Middle School. After graduating from elementary school, I looked forward to attending middle school. I was enrolled at Central Middle School as a 7th grader. The day I began school, I met one of my old friends from elementary school and was relieved to know someone in my new school. I liked school and enjoyed going every day. I was born with cerebral palsy, but liked to play sports. At recess time all I wanted to do was play basketball with everyone else. I also enjoyed the days I had PE. Sometimes I was reluctant to play with the other students during recess and PE because of my disability, but I really wanted to so I tried.

The bullying started in the 2nd quarter of the 7th grade. A boy began to ridicule me about my CP. He made comments in front of my friends and classmates and called me crippled. He would call me crippled when I was in class, walking down the hallway, and playing during recess. I talked to my counselor and she made us sign a contract saying that we wouldn't talk to each other and leave each other alone, but it didn't work.

Soon other kids began to make fun of me every chance they got. When I would try to play basketball during recess, the kids would tell me I couldn't play because I can't walk right. Every time I saw those kids in the hallway, I would turn around and walk the other way to avoid them, but then I would be late for class. I tried my best to avoid them all the time, but I would end up late for class, and felt like I had nowhere to go. This made me feel worthless, angry, sad and frustrated. It made me hate going to school and I never ever wanted to go back.

Two days before my winter break was over I really didn't want to go back to school and cried myself to sleep thinking about it. I didn't know what to do. Bullying made me become incredibly frustrated and it would affect my behavior at home. I would have outburst when told to do chores, and my mom wanted to know why I was so mad. I told her what was going on in school and she went to the office to talk to my principal and counselor.

I felt a little relieved and hoped they would stop teasing me and leave me alone, but they didn't. Because the bullying didn't stop I told my mom I hated school, so she said she would homeschool me.

LATE TESTIMONY

Homeschooling made my life better because I didn't get bullied anymore, but the bad side about it was I couldn't see my friends' every day.

I really want House Bill 688 to happen, so it can protect students like me. I also have a younger brother and sister and I don't want them to go through and feel the way I did.

Thank you for listening to me.

House Comm. on Judiciary

Hearing: Thurs., Feb. 17, 2011

2:00 p.m., Conf. Room 325

LATE TESTIMONY

Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB688

Relating to Education: SAFE SCHOOLS ACT

Aloha chairman Agaran and Members of the Committee,

My name is Aaron Cadiz and I am a senior at Waipahu High School. I strongly support HB688 because of its purpose; to protect students. Although the DOE has policies about bullying, I feel that it is not enough and needs to be updated. It is not enough because people like Zoe Hogan are still being called “white cockroaches.” If it’s not Zoe, it’s the “fat girl” the “gay guy” the “micros” or any other person that face bullying on a daily basis because they are different. Many people are suffering in silence because it seems like nothing is being done about bullying, and statistically, nothing is- according to the CDC more students in Hawaii do not feel safe at school. I am one of those students. I feel like I can’t be myself in certain classes because students and even teachers say offensive and even threatening comments about certain issues, creating an uncomfortable and unsafe environment for me to learn. The lack of feeling safe does not only affect me academically but socially as well. I don’t know if it’s safe to bring my boyfriend to prom. Although my counselor assured me that it’s okay for me to bring him, based on things that I’ve experienced in school, I am still uncomfortable. That’s why I support the article in HB688 that defines bullying because it includes definitions that encompasses the diverse kinds of bullying encountered today (ie. Cyber-bullying.) If it were to pass, ethnic minorities, queer (LGBTI), and people in poor economic standings will be protected, and maybe then their minds can be put at ease with the security of knowing that the DOE has “got their back.” Once again I strongly support HB688. It makes me hopeful-hopeful for a future where Hawaii schools are SAFE environments where diversity is encouraged, enabling the future leaders of tomorrow to grow in mind body and soul. Mahalo nui loa for taking the time to consider my testimony.

Aloha,

Aaron Cadiz