

**Statement of Tess Domb Sadof**  
**At Attorney General Coakley's Hearings**  
**to Make Recommendations on Bullying and Cyber-Bullying Laws**  
**February 17, 2011**

Hello, my name is Tess Domb Sadof. I want to thank Attorney General Martha Coakley and the Commission on Bullying Prevention for holding these hearings about the potential changes regarding bullying prevention to the Massachusetts General Laws. I am sorry that I am unable to attend the hearings scheduled for Springfield, MA on February 17, 2011. A previously scheduled field trip for school prevents my attendance. I am submitting these comments for the record and appreciate the opportunity to participate, in some way, in today's hearing.

As a junior at Amherst Regional High School, I've worked in my community to bring students' voices and experiences about bullying to the attention of school administrators and other students. My work has involved student surveys, interviews and contributing to an anti-bullying task force. Today, I would like to urge the Commission on Bullying Prevention to consider giving guidance to instruct schools to implement programs that support student participation and give students the skills and tools to intervene at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

I feel that the anti-bullying legislation needs to require, or at the very least encourage and prioritize, the use of student-initiated and student-focused activities to respond to bullying and to support witnesses to intervene. Students, as the direct participants in bullying episodes, need to be actively involved in the creation of anti-bullying policies, activities, and programs in their schools. Anti-bullying legislation needs to take the lead and support schools to create programs that value student involvement and reflect students' thoughts, perspectives, and needs. As legislation focused on the prevention of bullying, the law needs to play a significant role in pushing for the development and implementation of programs and student task forces that incorporate and amplify students' meaningful and often incredible ideas about bullying prevention. Student engagement shouldn't be just a box to check off. Without state encouragement and support, schools can easily minimize student involvement, reducing the impact of these programs, and, ultimately, reducing the potential impact of the law. The power of the law comes from student participation in bullying prevention.

Also, I urge you to consider establishing a Statewide Student Task Force on Bullying Prevention that would report to the Commission. I am very grateful that these hearings are taking place and that you scheduled this one for Western Massachusetts, however, a Statewide Student Task Force facilitate student involvement and get student input by holding hearings across the state. These kinds of hearings could be held regionally – or in various counties - during afterschool hours or in schools during the school day to encourage student insights and experiences to be shared. Such a task force could show that Massachusetts is a leader not only in responding to bullying as a public health problem but also in recognizing and supporting student leadership, participation, engagement in its prevention.

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Additionally, I think that anti-bullying legislation should lead the way in supporting schools to create programs that provide witnesses with the tools and skills to effectively and successfully respond to bullying. We have long defined bullying as an act that happens between two individuals; the bully and the victim, establishing punishments and consequences for the bullies and creating support systems for the targets. Yet, bullying usually also includes witnesses or bystanders who often don't know how to respond. By responding or ignoring bullying, witnesses' actions can show either acceptance of the bullying or rejection of it. Student witnesses hold the power to build caring and responsive communities in their schools. Anti-bullying legislation needs to emphasize the role of the witness. I urge you to identify programs that support bullying prevention by educating students on how to respond to bullying as a priority for curricular goals. These programs can address in-person and cyber-world prevention techniques and intervention strategies for effectively responding to bullying episodes.

In conclusion, schools and the Commission need to encourage, welcome, and use student input in developing our anti-bullying response. In addition to focusing on the consequences, legal issues, teacher training, and disciplinary responses to bullying in our schools, we need to prioritize student involvement. By making student involvement a focus, we will ensure that our policies and programs will succeed because they will reflect students' needs, ideas, suggestions, and experiences.

In closing, I'd like to end with some wise words by Martin Luther King, Jr, who said, "The time is always right to do the right thing". Thank you again for this opportunity to comment to The Commission to Review Statutes Relative to Implementation of the School Bullying Law. I greatly appreciate your willingness to hear my views.

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