

Hello, my name is Pat Gardner, and I am the director of the Center for Teacher Education and Research at Westfield State University. As Martha Coakley said last week in her remarks in Boston, the new bullying law is a good start. Still, there is much work to do and we are doing that at the Center. In conjunction with Dr. Elizabeth Stassinis of the WSU Criminal Justice Department, the CENTER has made a commitment to offering support and low-cost professional development to public and private school districts in the areas of bullying intervention and prevention, school climate, and interpreting the law.

So here we all are on February 17th, 2011, having been asked to consider ways to improve or strengthen an *Act relative to bullying*. As the Center has collected data from conferences that we have held or attended, insights from teachers, administrators, and students, and sought the professional counsel of Dr. Elizabeth Englander, Dr. Sameer Hindaju, Anne Gilligan, Kevin Jennings, Dr. Marlene Snyder of Olweus Bully Prevention, and the late Dr. Felice Yeskel, founder of the Stonewall Center and Class Action, we believe education, funding, and continued dialogue are the ways to combat bullying.

When it comes to parenting, there is no law making bad parenting a crime and there is no merit pay for exceptional parenting; thus, the key for the MA Department of Education, the Attorney General, school districts, and law enforcement is to provide training for parents in the laws surrounding bullying, in bully prevention, and in cyber safety and expertise.

Dr. Englander's testimony from last week is compelling and with her blessing, I am going to reiterate some key points:

Dr. Englander writes:

First, parents, communities, and schools must send a consistent message to the children that we are all raising together. This means that we need to work as partners, and to come to some kind of consensus about what the rules and expectations are for our children.

Second, it's through parents that children gain access to the technology that our research suggests is the primary means for bullying today. Now, we give kids access to many things that they could potentially misuse, but if parents are aware and educated about possible dangers, they usually law down the law.

So perhaps while we're looking at ways to make parents accountable, we should also be examining how to *help* them be accountable – how to give them the support, resources, education, and partnership they need in order to be firm and effective parents. (Englander 2011)

In alignment with Dr. Englander's belief about parent responsibility, the Center recommends that schools and/or districts have a funded position of equity coordinator to assure that discipline

policies of a school, including the Bully Prevention Plan, parent involvement, school climate, continued professional development, and mandated services for students and parents, as per ***An act relative to bullying***, are done in accordance with the law.

While the parent piece and the equity coordinator are crucial, another concern that we hear again and again is the need for funding. In fact, our own bully prevention effort is way in the red and without some quick and much-needed funding our efforts will be lessened OR WILL STOP ALTOGETHER. The Massachusetts law is innovative and ahead of other states, and while its passing in the legislature has been critical to the safety of our students, equally critical is that it is an unfunded mandate. Now that the law has life, has cut its teeth, and is mandated for schools, funding MUST follow. The sustainability and success of protecting our children demand it.

In conclusion, it is doubtful that we will return to the days when a private conversation meant having a 50 foot cord on the kitchen phone that if you were lucky you could stretch to your bedroom. Technology continues to improve and it improves our lives in many areas such as medicine, communication, and safety, but it also continues to offer faceless anonymity to aggressors. The Center's hope is that the Attorney General and the Massachusetts State legislature will continue its support of ***An act relative to bullying*** and to beef up efforts with parent guidelines, equity regulators, and funding.

WE KNOW YOU VALUE THE ROLE THAT STATE UNIVERSITIES AND OUR CENTER FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AT WESTFIELD CAN PLAY. WE ARE THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN NEW EDUCATORS, SCHOOLS AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PARENTS.

Thank you for the work of this commission and thank for allowing me the opportunity to testify.