

Subject: Testimony Regarding Proposed Changes to School Bullying and Harassment Legislation HB 131 and SB 575

To the Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding potential changes to the legal definitions of bullying and harassment in our schools. While there is a perception that current laws are insufficient, I believe our current definitions are clear and the protocols for investigation are robust.

The Data Reflects Awareness, Not Just Occurrence

In my district, we dedicate significant resources to training. Staff undergo over four hours of annual training on bullying, harassment, and suicide prevention, with additional "Know & Tell" training biennially. Our students receive similar education through their health curriculum.

This investment has been successful: our students and staff are highly aware and proactive, resulting in multiple reports annually. However, as NH Department of Education statistics show, the number of *investigations* far exceeds the number of *substantiated incidents* that meet the legal definition. This is not a sign of misreporting; it is a sign of a high-functioning reporting culture. Redefining the problem to "suit the numbers" may give the appearance of action, but it does not address the root cause.

Recommendation: Data-Driven Analysis

I urge the legislature to support the proposed committee to analyze the existing data provided by the NH Department of Education. An informed analysis of the gap between reports and substantiated findings will provide the facts necessary for a meaningful solution, rather than a reactionary change in language.

Focusing on the Real Need: Resources

Our primary challenge is not the law, but the lack of outside mental health and wellness resources for families. While we have seen gains in hotlines and recovery centers, many families fall into the "gap"—they do not qualify for state assistance but lack the means to access private care. I worry that we are prioritizing legislative language changes over the tangible resources families desperately need.

I am not advocating for the reduction of any existing programs. Rather, I ask that we focus our legislative efforts on the areas where schools are currently unable to reach.

Respectfully,

Kathy Tetreault

NHASP Legislative Advocacy Committee
