



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo Unveils Anti-Bullying Bills For Child Safety

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(Albany) – Senator Joseph A. Griffo (R-IP-C) today joined members of the Senate Republican Conference in announcing the introduction of a legislative slate of bills targeted to prevent bullying, cyber-bullying and hazing among New York schoolchildren.

Senator Griffo is co-sponsoring a legislative package which would also prohibit any type of bullying on school property or school functions, increase the penalties for hazing, and establish a statewide central registry for reporting bullying, cyber-bullying and hazing complaints.

“Being able to resolve conflict is a life-long skill that we try to learn when we’re young, but we’re dealing with conflict that has turned into aggression and has gone outside the school-halls,” Griffo said. “School officials and parents do their best to monitor aggressive behavior aimed at kids, but intimidation of children by their peers has moved away from the schoolyard and into the backyard.”

New York is one of only seven states that do not have a specific law to target school bullying. Bully Police, a national watchdog group, has given New York State its lowest possible grade for not passing a law to protect schoolchildren from bullies.

Recent news stories have highlighted a number of vicious incidents of bullying in New York schools that show this type of peer abuse has become more pervasive and destructive. Last month, a West Islip teen hanged herself after being harassed by

cyber-bullies who taunted her even in death. Another West Islip teenager was repeatedly cyber-bullied and beaten so badly by a classmate that she had to have reconstructive surgery on her face. In Brooklyn, a 5-year-old kindergarten student was beat up by classmates, who also cut her hair.

The anti-bullying package would give New York schools the tools to help reduce bullying by including instructions about discouraging bullying within a school's character education program and requiring all school employees to report incidents of bullying if they have a reasonable suspicion that a student is being victimized.

The Anti-Bullying Plan consists of three bills (S. 1253-A, S. 7158, S.298,) that would:

- Require school districts to include methods for discouraging acts of bullying and cyber-bullying within the required instruction in civility, citizenship, and character education;
- Define bullying and cyber-bullying and add these acts to the list of incidents for which disciplinary measures must be taken pursuant to the school district's code of conduct;
- Require all school employees to report incidents of bullying and cyber-bullying;
- Create the crime of Aggravated Harassment of Teachers and School Personnel;
- Establish a state hotline for individuals to report instances of bullying, cyber-bullying and hazing;
- Elevate the penalties associated with the crimes of hazing, particularly in cases where a person is injured or dies.

Griffo added, "We've reached a point where the health and safety of children become a priority over a privacy right. The proliferation of social network sites have allowed some to direct hate, derision, and intimidation toward children who didn't ask for it."

John Halligan, father of Ryan Halligan who died by suicide in 2003 in Vermont, said, "School is the one place where most of our children come together to learn not only

the fundamentals in academics, but also critical social skills. Promoting and enforcing respectful behavior during the school years will only pay dividends into the future as they carry these critical lessons into their adulthood. Since my wife and I will be moving back to New York this summer with our 12-year-old son, we are hopeful this proposed legislation moves swiftly and successfully into law.” Mr. Halligan spearheaded the Vermont bullying prevention law, ACT 117, in 2004.

Yesterday, the Governor of Massachusetts signed anti-bullying legislation into law in the wake of the suicide of 15-year-old Phoebe Prince of Massachusetts, which brought national attention to the problem of bullying and cyber-bullying.

Statistics show that efforts are working in states where bullying prevention is taught in schools. According to the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, bullying can be reduced by up to 50% when there is a school-wide commitment to preventative and educational programs aimed at raising awareness, increasing teacher and parent involvement, forming clear rules and strong social norms against bullying and providing support and protection for students.

The United State Department of Justice reports that cyber-bullying, bullying through the means of any electronic device, is at an all time high. Forty-three percent of teenagers reported being victims of cyber-bullying. Nine in 10 teens, or 92%, reported knowing their bully; however only 10 percent of those cyber-bullying victims told their parents. Cyberbullying often involves vicious anonymous taunts on social networking sites such as Facebook.