



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Betty Little

Little: Strengthen New York's Anti-bullying Laws

BETTY LITTLE May 6, 2010

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State Senator Betty Little joined several of her Senate Republican colleagues at a news conference in Albany today to urge action on a package of bills they have introduced to address the growing problem of bullying.

The legislators cited the vicious nature of cyber-bullying, which allows students, through social networking sites and texting, to bully and harass long after the school day has ended.

“Left unaddressed, the intensity of bullying usually grows greater each day for the child subjected to teasing, ridicule, isolation and physical violence,” said Little. “Cyber-bullying goes far beyond what many of us may have encountered on the playground when we were kids. Our schools are on the frontline and it’s not an easy issue to address. But increased sensitivity, clearer guidelines on how to prevent bullying, and what to do when it happens, would mean a lot to thousands of kids who are needlessly suffering because they can’t escape the bullying.”

The legislative package would provide New York schools more direction to reduce bullying, including instructions about discouraging bullying within a school’s character education program and requiring school employees to report incidents of bullying if they have a reasonable suspicion that a student is being victimized.

The legislative package also would prohibit any type of bullying on school property and at school functions, increase the penalties for hazing, and establish a statewide central registry for reporting bullying, cyber-bullying and hazing complaints.

According to the lawmakers, 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.

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 reported knowing their bully; however only 10 percent of those cyber-bullying victims told their parents. Cyber-bullying often involves vicious anonymous taunts on social networking sites such as Facebook.

The Anti-Bullying Plan consists of three bills (S. 1253-A, Saland; S. 7158, Hannon; S. 298, Little) 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.