



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Hugh T. Farley

Senator Farley Gives Tips for Online Safety: New York State Also Passes New Cyberbullying Law

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Internet safety and online message and social boards are big concerns for parents, State Senator Hugh T. Farley (R, C, I - Schenectady) said. Children may think they are being safe online, but predators are often able to find out personal information about the youth.

"The teens think they are being safe but a determined predator may pick up on subtle clues such as a teen wearing a T-shirt with the school's name. Once they know where the child lives, it is easy to initiate conversation with them or stalk them," Senator Farley said.

"Computers are incredible tools that open the door to an abundance of information. But children can also be exposed to a whole different world that they aren't prepared for," Senator Farley said. "Some pedophiles use youth-oriented Internet bulletin boards to engage children in sexually-oriented conversations."

"State and federal laws provide strong penalties for sexual predators who would lure our children. But, parents are the first line of defense in this war," Senator Farley said.

The following are suggestions from Senator Farley for parents concerning online computer safety:

- * Parents want to know who their children are hanging out with after school. The same rule should apply online: know who your children communicate with.
- * Locate the computer in a high-traffic area. This way, parents can keep better tabs on the websites their children visit.
- * As parents, warn children about stranger-danger -- never talking to strangers and people that you don't know. Warn children to not give out personal information, such as their address, phone number, or family financial information (including credit card numbers), to strangers over the Internet.

Unfortunately, not all cyber threats come from strangers, Senator Farley said, nor do they all happen after school. Bullying is a real issue many children deal with and bullies continue to threaten victims both face-to-face and via the Internet at both school and at home.

According to the non-profit organization "End to Cyber Bullying," more than 95 percent of teen-agers use social networking sites to communicate with peers and more than 1 in 3 young people have been threatened online. Some 25 percent of adolescents and teens have been bullied repeatedly through texts or the Internet and 90 percent of young people do not tell their parents when cyber bullying occurs.

Recognizing the seriousness of the problem of "cyberbullying," a new State law that went into effect this summer clarifies and expands the 2010 Dignity for All Students Act, an anti-bullying law that first created guidelines for local school districts to develop policies and procedures to address the problem of bullying.

This new law enhances a school's ability to combat harassment and bullying by improving reporting, investigation, intervention, training and prevention. School districts are required to take immediate action in the event that a student is being cyberbullied or harassed in any other way. In addition, the legislation provides improved training procedures for teachers and administrators to prevent and respond to bullying.

These measures are important to eliminate hostile environments, create a more positive school culture and climate, prevent recurrences, and ensure the safety of the bullied/harassed student and the safety of all students.