

Adam Heitner

Hi, my name is Adam Heitner, I am 14, and I am a Jewish high school student from Roslyn High School on Long Island. At Temple Sinai, where I go to synagogue, I have been learning about the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), which takes effect in July as well as other statutes, laws, and bills that have to do with bullying and the act of harassment as well as intimidation and cyber bullying.

As a New York teenager, I am very appreciative of the passing of DASA. However, while I appreciate everything that the New York legislature has done for teens with regard to bullying, I think there is much more that we can do to stop bullying. Statistics show that bullying may cause lower grades, increased insecurities, and make school a dangerous place instead of a safe one. When lives are changed in negative ways because of bullying or – worse – cut short entirely, we can't know what the potential of the victim could have been – maybe they could have cured cancer or created the next best piece of technology. We have to take measures to ensure that all teenagers are able to thrive.

Judaism teaches me that to be a bystander is just as bad as being a bully. Consequently, I try my hardest to report any bullying I see to a responsible adult figure. Now, though, teens are being bullied not only in person but also online. I've had personal encounters with cyberbullying and my friends. One of my best friends since I was in pre-school went to Roslyn Middle School with me. He was picked on and bullied online for being overweight. Many people also spread rumors that my friend was gay and that he was weird over the Internet. He was incredibly hurt, and I defended him constantly, tried to stop the bullying whenever I could, and tried to cheer him up.

Eventually, he ended up transferring to a private school because of the intense *harassment*.
Because we no longer attend the same school, I do not get to talk to him much anymore. He was my best friend, and I know how rough it was for him. One way to curb bullying would be to amend DASA to require that teachers educate their students about how dangerous cyberbullying can be. I hope you will consider this important amendment so that other teenagers do not lose their best friends because of cyberbullying like I did.

Hi, my name is Jordan Weinstock, and I am 14 years old. I am here today to talk to you about cyberbullying, which is an issue that is really important to me. I was shocked to learn that 43% of US teens are reported to have been subject to cyber-bullying. Over the years due to increased use of social media and the Internet, it has become much easier to embarrass, harass, and just bully people in general. Now information travels at amazing speeds, allowing kids to spread and discover new information ten times faster than 20 years ago. As we try to find a solution to ending bullying, it is important to not just punish those who have bullied, but to deter future bullies from doing it at all. Any bullying, no matter how it is done or where it is done – whether in the school cafeteria or over the Internet in students' homes – will effect the mindset of the victim, carrying into the school environment or other places. Harsher punishments are more likely to stop someone from doing a crime. Being charged with manslaughter is much different than being given an afterschool detention. And, so, I believe that, even if one does not directly cause the death of another, bullycide should be considered manslaughter under the law.

As a teenager, I have had personal experiences with how dangerous it can be when bullies are not properly punished. Several years ago a friend of mine was being bullied constantly at school and he got really frustrated. The school administration did not really punish the bully but just talked to him and asked him to stop. My friend became so frustrated that he felt his only option was to take matters into his own hands, and he threatened to stab his bully with a pencil. Students should never have to be in this situation. It should be up to adults to have the proper channels to discourage bullies from picking on victims. Bullying can

have really extreme consequences for the victim, too. A close friend of mine was bullied at summer camp and I noticed that it affected the way he went about everyday life. He was sad all the time, he didn't really want to participate at camp activities, which was a big change since he is usually one of the happiest kids at camp and doesn't typically let things get him down.

In Judaism, there is a teaching that says: "If I am not for not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, who am I? And, if not now, when?" This teaches us that we should act immediately whenever we see a problem. It also teaches us that, if we don't act on this problem, who else will? Our state can be the role model for all other states by defining bullycide as manslaughter in our state's anti-bullying legislation, DASA. I ask you to consider the IDC's proposal to amend DASA to include the definition of bullycide as manslaughter.

Cyber-bullying is a wildfire in New York State. It is taking lives, destroying dreams, and making entire communities distraught. It is our duty as citizens to act on this issue, instead of letting cyber-bullying and cyber-bullying induced suicides to continue to increase exponentially. Up to this point, arguments have been made opposing cyber-bullying bills due to the First Amendment. However, do you think that in ~~the~~ 1789 when the Bill of Rights was passed that anyone thought that there would be any inventions, such as a BlackBerry or iPhone, when they didn't even have electricity? Clearly our founding fathers had no idea of the extent of technology that is available today or how easily people can use this technology to harm other human beings. We must take this into account and realize that ~~the~~ freedom of speech does not mean that people are allowed to violate another person's privacy or emotional security by using technology for no logical reason and those who do this must be punished.

If you saw a person on the verge of death, would you let them die or would you try to help them? Judaism stresses the importance of helping out your neighbors and those who surround you. If this bill is not passed, essentially we are letting our neighbors die. When people are aware of the consequences, they are less likely to commit an act that would lead to these consequences. If this bill is passed, there will be punishment to cyber-bullies, which should lead to less cyber-bullying. In turn, cyber-bullying induced suicide should decrease as well.

Everyone can agree that being a teenager is like riding a rollercoaster; you have your extreme highs and lows. Teenagers tend to have very unstable minds and may act impulsively at times. Cyber-bullying is extremely dangerous to teenagers because being that I am a teenager myself, I can honestly say that sometimes I view things that are very minor as the end of the world. I myself would never consider committing suicide but other people my age may act impulsively because they are cyber-bullying victims. To see that people my own age are taking their own lives truly breaks my heart.

Cyber-bullying is a major issue affecting us today and we can't let it continue without punishment. Just like a wildfire, if the criminal acts within cyber-bullying are ignored, it will continue to burn, leaving only wreckage and despair in its rage. I believe that the content of each bill is fair. However, I think that the word "manslaughter" should be substituted by a different word to avoid misunderstanding and misuse of the word. Manslaughter has always been the killing of a person with contact, but ~~the~~ ^{cyber-bullying} does not involve physical contact, rather it involves use of technology leading to a person to kill themselves. Perhaps a new category of homicide should be developed that would be geared directly towards cyber-bullying and would have different levels of the charge and punishment depending on various factors, including, but not limited to, age of the perpetrator, extent of cyber-bullying, and level of mental stability of the victim. These two criminal statutes are the water hose to the wildfire. They are going to save communities from absolute distress. When a child commits suicide, it is not just that child that has suffered. A whole community suffers.

Jacob Rosen

SORTY Advocacy Day in Albany 2012

Hi my name is Jake and I am 14. Bullying is a horrible issue. So many kids are affected by it across America and there need to be laws, especially in our great state!

I believe we need to create specific laws to prevent **cyberbullying**. Nearly a dozen 12-15 year olds have committed suicide due to cyber bullying since 2010. According to PEW statistics, 93% of all teens spend time online and 32% of them have reported experiencing cyberbullying. That's almost a third of online teens. This is a **huge** issue! 26% ~~have~~ also have reported being harassed by **text**. We don't want to see any more of our fellow teens take their lives because they've been bullied online or by text.

As a Jew, my tradition teaches me that "It's not my responsibility to **finish** the task but I'm also not free to **ignore** it. So I'm here today to **do my part**: I'm asking for improvements in our state's law regarding cyberbullying. I cannot stand idly by while other kids my age commit suicide because they've been tormented online.

As a teen, I know firsthand that the major focus of anti-bullying legislation has to be on **cyberbullying**. If there were stiffer penalties for this kind of harassment,

fewer teens would participate in it. No teenager wants to go to jail for posting embarrassing pics of someone for everyone to see on Facebook or for repeatedly insulting someone by text. As a teen, I believe the threat of stricter punishments will change the way we act online.

After learning about this issue at Temple Sinai, I am here to ask ~~asking~~ that the New York State Legislature recognize cyberbullying as 3rd degree stalking and bullycide as manslaughter. I want the Independent Democratic Conference's cyberbullying bill passed because, no matter what the intent, the result of cyberbullying is significant harm and sometimes even death. You can't take that back.