



**District of Columbia City Council  
Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation  
Public Hearing on  
Bill 19-11,  
The “Bullying and Intimidation Prevention Act of  
2011”**

**Monday, May 2, 2011  
10:00 a.m.  
Room 120  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004**

**Washington Teachers’ Union  
President Nathan Saunders**

Good morning Madam Chair Bowser, and other members of the Council. My name is Nathan Saunders. I am here before you in my capacity as President of the Washington Teachers' Union. As a teachers union, working on behalf of students, we are in support of the "Bullying and Intimidation Prevention Act of 2011."

The WTU is deeply concerned about this epidemic which is sweeping the nation. Schools are intended as a safe haven for children and teenagers. This doesn't just mean safe and orderly classrooms and buildings. It means ensuring dignity and respect for all. Just as we are committed to improving student learning and teacher quality, so are we dedicated to eliminating bullying and intimidation in our schools.

This is clearly a community issue on which we must all work together. In looking out for the safety of our children, teachers, parents, school administrators, principals, school nurses, counselors, school psychologists, and bus drivers must all play a part. We have a responsibility to ensure that bullying doesn't happen. And if it does, we must be able to handle it promptly and effectively. Our children must see us as allies in this battle. This piece of legislation is a major step in creating a framework for us to all work together in protecting our children. However, there are a few sections that I believe could be improved in order to make this a more inclusive body of legislation.

First, WTU would like to broaden Section 2, Definitions, to include employees as well. It is extremely important to note that bullying does not only impact students. It affects teachers and staff as well. I have recently been in touch with Dr. Gabrielle Grunau, a former DCPS school psychologist. Her dissertation on mobbing, another form of bullying, was completed based largely on her experiences as a DCPS employee. Based on her research, WTU believes this

legislation would be strengthened by implementing a form of protection for employees as well. Dr. Grunau has stated that she is willing to assist in this matter.

Additionally, under Section 3, Policy Requirement, WTU would like to see the language amended in Section 3(a), line 13. As it is written, DCPS is not required to include key stakeholders like teachers and their collective bargaining agents in the adoption of this important policy. It has been our past experience that unless required, DCPS has not included teachers and WTU in policy creation and implementation. In order to best protect the rights of our members, we would like to see this language amended to require WTU's inclusion in this process.

Next, in Section 4, Reprisal, retaliation, false accusation prohibited, WTU is pleased to see language included where employees are immune from litigation should they properly report an incident of harassment, intimidation or bullying. However, WTU finds that Section 4(c) would be even stronger if it included language which stated that employees would be entitled to legal representation from their employer at no cost to the employee. Employees often are hindered from reporting not just for fear of litigation, but also for the enormous costs with which it is associated. By including such language, employees will be further encouraged to report these horrible acts.

Finally, I would like to emphasize Section 5 of the proposed legislation, the Establishment of bullying prevention programs. I cannot express how important training is in order for this legislation to be successful. Unfortunately, although bullying can be harmful to children, adults are often unaware of bullying problems. Often bullying takes place in areas of schools, homes, or communities that are difficult for adults to supervise. A prime example of this is the internet. Even when bullying does happen under our supervision, often times we miss its

subtle clues like social exclusion, note-passing, or threatening looks. We all need training to become more aware of the signs of modern bullying.

Additionally, adults are often unaware of harassment because many children do not report it. They may fear retaliation or they may fear that adults won't take their concerns seriously or will act inappropriately to deal with the bullying. Through appropriate training, we can help to open the lines of communication and provide a greater sense of security.

As educators it is our responsibility to send a clear message to our youth that bullying will not be tolerated. For those who are bullied, these students need to receive clear messages from the adults in the community that they will be supported appropriately. For students who bully, they must have a clear understanding of the consequences and impact of their behavior.

By working together, all school staff – not just teachers and administrators, but bus drivers, cafeteria workers, media specialists, school nurses, secretaries, and school resource officers – we can assess the specific bullying problems occurring on our campuses and develop necessary strategies to address the issues. The WTU believes Bill 19-11 provides such a framework.

However, in order for this bill to be most effective, the WTU believes that Section 3, the Policy Requirement, should actually require the inclusion of all stakeholders in the implementation of this policy. The simple “attempt” to include stakeholders in the process of the adoption of this important policy is not enough. Parents or guardians, employees, volunteers, students, administrators and community representatives must be included in this process in order for policy to be effective and bullying to be eradicated.

We look forward to working together with other key stakeholders in order to address this epidemic.

Thank you, Madam Chair Bowser and other members of the Council for your time, and the opportunity to testify here today.