



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**

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**Testimony Re: House Bill 7071 Relating to Education- Health and Safety of Pupils.**

**House Health, Education & Welfare Committee**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 7071. This bill would direct the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to conduct a review and to revise the statewide bullying policy, direct schools to provide more information about bullying on school websites and directs all school principals to provide a biannual report of bullying incidents in schools.

Bullying behavior is a social, educational, and health problem that affects many children

and adolescents in Rhode Island and in the U.S. Bullying incidents among students create a climate of fear and disrespect that can negatively impact student learning. Youth involved in bullying can experience higher rates of mental health problems, aggression, suicide, drug use, school absence, physical health problems, and deficits in cognitive functioning during childhood and adolescence as well as into adulthood.

In the past, bullying primarily occurred where children physically played or learned. New technology has expanded the environments in which children and youth may experience bullying. Children and youth now increasingly interact and connect through an array of electronic platforms, such as texting, instant messaging and chats, email, social media, and others, which can include words, photos, and videos.

**Bully Status, by Gender and Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2017**

	MIDDLE SCHOOL		HIGH SCHOOL	
	MALE	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALE
Bullied on School Property	27%	40%	15%	19%
Bullied Electronically	13%	31%	11%	17%
Been in a Physical Fight	21%	10%	13%	8%

Source: *Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017*, Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis.

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In 2017 in Rhode Island, 21% of middle school students (31% female and 13% of males) and 14% of high school students (17% of females and 11%

of males) reported being electronically bullied. According to the 2019 *SurveyWorks* statewide survey, 40% of students in Rhode Island reported difficulty in getting help from an adult if bullied in school.

Specific student subgroups populations are at increased risk of being bullied, including youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). In 2017, 31% of Rhode Island high school students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) reported being bullied on school property.

Students with disabilities are overrepresented within the bullying dynamic, whether as children who have bullied, children who have been bullied, or children who have both bullied and have been bullied. In 2015, in Rhode Island, 25% of high school students who had been bullied on school property reported having a long-term emotional problem or learning disability.

Preventing, identifying, and addressing bullying behavior requires the complementary and sustained efforts of educators, school administrators, students, parents, health care providers, families, policymakers, and others. Rhode Island should implement and track evidence-based anti-bullying laws and policies at the community-, district-, and school-levels that prevent, identify, and address bullying. These policies should be reviewed and revised regularly and be responsive to the development of new technologies. Bullying prevention policies at the district level should specifically include LGBTQ youth and youth with disabilities.

Data on the prevalence of all forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, relational, property, cyber, and bias-based bullying, and the prevalence of students involved in bullying (including perpetrators, victims, bully-victims, and bystanders) should be regularly collected, analyzed, and shared. This may be accomplished by including bullying measures in the existing state survey, *SurveyWorks*, and other instruments that may be developed in the future. District-level bullying data should be to be collected, tracked, and publicly reported by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.