

BILL052(22)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 458

PUBLIC SAFETY

PUBLIC SAFETY Meeting

Meeting Date: Oct 19, 2022 @ 02:30 PM

Support: 1

Oppose: 0

I wish to comment: 0

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Representing: CARES	Position: Support	Submitted: Oct 19, 2022 @ 02:24 PM

Testimony:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm Zhizi Xiong and I'm testifying on behalf of my grassroots organization, CARES. We are registered with the ethics commission to be able to lobby and to provide testimony. I'd like to commend Councilmember Augie for drafting this bill. Bullying is unacceptable in all environments: at school, at work, and in the city departments.

At the state, there is legislation to stop bullying at DOE schools. HB 225 requires the board of education to develop a bullying prevention & response action plan. It is the due diligence of the DOE, lawmakers, teachers, staff, parents & counselors to take action to prevent bullying and to protect children & youth. Every state, except Montana, has either passed a law or advocates for school policies to implement a bullying policy and procedures to investigate when bullying occurs.

However, even with the good intentions of these legislations & policies, the reality of the fact is that bullying is inevitable. Teachers don't want confrontation or the responsibility of addressing bullying. And students tend to go along with the bullying. Direct confrontation of bullying behavior doesn't result in a lot of progress. And so, there should be an emphasis on teaching students to be resilient to bullying, stress, abuse & trauma. There should be an emphasis on healing from bullying & trauma. How do we teach kids to be resilient to trauma & stress?

Often times, teachers, parents & program coordinators put an overemphasis on academics instead of addressing students' need for nurture, care, social development, support & mental health awareness. Social stressors are inevitable: Bullying, ostracizing, domestic abuse, these are the sources of trauma for students. It is important to recognize students are not capable of processing & healing on their own. It is an educator's duty to help students with this and to communicate to teachers, principals, schools & policy makers if there's a gap to be addressed. In many instances, it is not an opportunity gap creating a disparity in access to quality education and resources that causes students to be unsuccessful. In many instances, students are unsuccessful because they do not have adequate social & emotional support outside of the classroom.

Bullying is a derivative of a broader topic: trauma, stress & abuse. And so, I'd like to highlight trauma, trauma informed care & social emotional learning (SEL) as subject matters of consideration to be implemented by policymakers. These are effective strategies taught within the education sector to teachers, staff & counselors and it is based upon credible research. There should be consideration for mandatory training for all staff & teachers on identifying trauma, implementing Social Emotional Learning strategies & practicing trauma informed care. Trauma informed care is the practice of promoting a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing.

To convey what this will look like in practice, it can manifest in different ways. SEL strategies include: discussions about mental health awareness, removing stigma about mental health, promoting positivity exercises in the classroom, implementing art-based therapeutic strategies or breathing exercises, etc. It could look like encouraging positive behavior, teaching students about positive ways to relate to each other, teaching students strategies on how to be resilient in the face of trauma, stress, abuse & bullying. In the education sector, trauma informed care & SEL are topics that are frequently discussed. Educators, afterschool program staff, counselors, teachers & staff are provided information through conferences & training programs about trauma & SEL to be able to better support students & youths.

Dr. Susan Bunting, the former State Secretary of Education, said:

"Our SEL is strategically placed as a universal strategy to build resilience, cultivate protective factors, like strong relationships with peers and adults, and reduce stigma around mental health help-seeking."

It is imperative that Hawaii aligns itself with the standards that have been set nationally by public policies & legislations across the US. According to CASEL & the National Conference of State Legislatures, all 50 states has enacted SEL legislation for preschools. 27 states have adopted K-12 SEL policy. These are the most recent legislations that states have enacted relating to SEL: Washington HB 2816, Connecticut HB 7215, Mississippi HB 1283, Colorado SB 272 & Texas HB 18.

According to the National Public Radio:

'Research shows this type of approach pays off. In 2011, researchers looked at more than 200 SEL programs across the country and saw improvements in behavior and academic achievement. A 2015 study found students deemed more socially competent in kindergarten were more likely to graduate from high school on time, complete a college degree and get a stable job in young adulthood. From an economic point of view, another 2015 study found SEL programs yield \$11 for every \$1 spent on them, by reducing crime, increasing earnings and contributing to better health.'

Implementing effective policies to address bullying, it's not just about stopping bullying and reporting it. It's also about healing from trauma, building resilience in kids, giving kids tools to be able to combat stress, trauma & bullying. Because more often than not, teachers & staff are not going to be able to protect every student.

In a recent panel, Lt. Governor Green, who works in an emergency room, said trauma is going to be the most significant challenge we will have to recover from because of the pandemic. Trauma has a significant impact on students' study patterns, mental acuity, concentration and cognitive functioning. If the City will help to address the inevitable trauma students must face, they will have succeeded in affecting healthy development in students, uplifting students' spirits, creating mental & emotional stability in our keikis, and consequently, it will help youths to excel academically and then become positive contributors to society.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Blessings,
CARES