

BILL052(22)

Testimony

MISC. COMM. 19

PARKS, ENTERPRISE SERVICES AND CULTURE & THE ARTS (PESCA)

**PARKS, ENTERPRISE SERVICES AND CULTURE &
THE ARTS (PESCA) Meeting**

Meeting Date: Jan 11, 2023 @ 01:00 PM

Support: 1

Oppose: 0

I wish to comment: 0

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Representing: CARES Community Advocacy Research Education Services	Position: Support	Submitted: Jan 11, 2023 @ 11:35 AM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair & Members of the Committee,

My name is Zhizi Xiong and I'm testifying in strong support on behalf of my grassroots, CARES. The mayor's administration testified Oct 19 during the Public Safety Committee meeting about how bullying can lead to suicide. We often think this could be an exaggeration or perhaps those statistics are overmagnifying the situation. It is not an exaggeration. I stand here before you today to tell you about a very personal testimony about my cousin, Byron, or Tiffany.

He was aggressively bullied in school. To the point where he could not walk into a public bathroom anymore and had to change schools. He continued to get ostracized, ridiculed & humiliated all throughout high school and then after school in the workplace. In 2018, when we were 28, he took his own life. There were other factors contributing to this tragedy. There weren't mental health resources provided...there were socioeconomic factors that played into this tragedy...but bullying played the biggest part because it was a repeated pattern all throughout his life. He was also gay & transgender. Often times, LGBTQIAs are bullied the most.

A lot of times people will minimize bullying without realizing the impact it has on students.

Parents, teachers, staff, principals & program leaders will normalize & minimize bullying because they are not equipped with the tools & resources to address these behaviors. And so, they look the other way or join in on the bullying thinking that it doesn't really matter.

Identifying & providing training, as stated in this Bill, are 2 key factors to addressing bullying.

Although this is only for City programs, this will now set the precedence for other agencies & government entities to follow suit. It is absolutely necessary for management, authority figures & policymakers to create a standard to address bullying, trauma & mental health.

On behalf of CARES, we, along with afterschool program staff, teachers & principals attend educational seminars about these behaviors. The broad topic here and the root of the problem is mental health. SEL, Social Emotional Learning, a strategy to address mental health, has been integrated into educational curriculums because research has proven modeling kindness, providing support and sustaining good relationships will combat bullying and negative behaviors. Our program, CARES, implements art education with SEL to provide support to our communities to address mental health, social stressors & bullying. It helps students & community members to process their emotions so that they won't resort to negative behaviors but they will learn to work through what they're feeling. CDC and other violence prevention partners & researchers have invested in learning more about the relationship between bullying & suicide, 2 severe public health problems, with the goal of using this knowledge to save lives and to prevent bullying.

The CDC says,

"In the past decade, headlines reporting the tragic stories of a young person's suicide death linked in some way to bullying (physical, verbal, or online) have become regrettably common. There is so much pain and suffering associated with each of these events, affecting individuals, families, communities and our society as a whole and resulting in an increasing national outcry to "do something" about the problem of bullying and suicide...We know enough about the relationship between bullying and suicide-related behavior to make evidence-based recommendations to improve prevention efforts."

The CDC notes,

“What We Know about Bullying

- Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived
- power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying
- includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally,
- and excluding someone from a group on purpose. Bullying can occur in-person or through technology
- Negative outcomes of bullying (for youth who bully others, youth who are bullied, and youth who both
- are bullied and bully others) may include: depression, anxiety, involvement in interpersonal violence or
- sexual violence, substance abuse, poor social functioning, and poor school performance, including lower
- grade point averages, standardized test scores, and poor attendance.
- Youth who report frequently bullying others and youth who report being frequently bullied are at
- increased risk for suicide-related behavior.
- Youth who report both bullying others and being bullied (bully-victims) have the highest risk for suiciderelated behavior of any groups that report involvement in bullying”

In my last written testimony, I'd like to retract what I had wrote. These were the instructions I got from the City Clerk, to testify and correct my previous statement. I referred to CASEL & the National Conference of the State Legislature, they said all 50 states have a public policy about Social Emotional Learning. The way the word policy is used doesn't necessarily mean a law, it could be a policy supported by all public schools but not implemented by law. But in my testimony, I inferred that they had meant law by the word policy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Blessings,

Zhizi Xiong