

Written Testimony IN SUPPORT of HB 2200

Before the House Committee on Federal and State Affairs

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Chairman Barker and members of the committee:

My name is Alissa Byerly, and I am writing today as a private citizen, and not as a representative of the State of Kansas or any of its agencies and programs. I am respectfully asking that you pass HB 2200 so that State Employees will have protections when it comes to being bullied in the workplace. Today, I want to share my experiences with workplace bullying and how it affected me.

I have worked for the state of Kansas for almost 5 years now. When I first started I was excited to work here. People seemed so nice and the pay was pretty good. After awhile it started to wear upon me. My first impression of the people who worked here also drastically changed as time wore on. The people who worked here were cruel to others, cruel in a way that couldn't be fought against. It made me feel weak and powerless like nothing I did would help.

The first instance of bullying that happened to me was from my Unit Leader a few months after I got out of training. I volunteered to work overtime often. One day my Unit Leader came on to the unit and walked around getting the patients worked up. This was a common occurrence on the unit at the time. As soon as he noticed the patients rising agitation he went to leave the unit. I will admit to being overly tired and that what I said was uncalled for but I asked him if for once he could stick around after agitating the residents and help out with the mess he created.

Needless to say he didn't stick around. After that he started micromanaging my time at work. Also, I started receiving feedbacks what seemed like a couple times a week. One such feedback was that he had been informed that I was looking for another job. I wasn't looking while at work and I did not speak to anyone, staff or resident, about it. Most of the feedbacks that I received were completely bogus and when I told him and my direct supervisor that they weren't true I was ignored. With all of the feedbacks in my file my Unit Leader attempted to extend my probation and gave me an unsatisfactory on my performance evaluation.

After dealing with this constant bullying I attempted to put in a transfer to get away from my Unit Leader and was denied. It finally got to the point where I was calling-in sick to get away from him and was physically ill quite a few times when I had to stay over (to work mandatory overtime) and chanced seeing him. I was finally able to transfer to a completely different building. Even now, I panic when I have to go back to my old unit to work. He's not there any longer but the anxiety remains along with the feeling that I'm going to get written up for simply breathing while I'm there.

Since then I've had instances of bullying happen to me multiple times. Most of them were ones that I could ignore or make them stop. A few times, I went home in tears because of the words that were said to me. I was called many different names, and still am on occasion, by staff. The staff that stated those things continued to escalate their behavior until I once again felt trapped by the negative behavior, and once again I ran by transferring to another unit.

I was accused of many different things through my time working out here. The most recent and probably one of the most maddening was a coworker going around stating that I was yelling at her all the time and forcing her to do my work while talking about what a cruel person that I am. When I found out I stayed away from her for awhile. I knew that if I talked to her I would lose my temper. After quite a few days I had started to calm down and she called me in to the nurse's office with my direct supervisor on the unit. She asked if I hated her. My response was "no, I do not," but I was quite upset about the rumors that she was spreading. She simply stated, "I didn't think that people would talk and tell you what was being said." I was hurt after all of the help I had given her she would behave in such a way.

Working for the state of Kansas I have slowly learned to ignore instances of bullying because it's not worth the fight. I've learned that you can't change what is happening and the only way to help yourself is to fight back. I've been micromanaged, had rumors spread, harassed, glared at, talked down to, and so many more. There's nothing that the state of Kansas does to make it stop. They don't seem to want to help their employees.

There have even been instances where my doctor has placed me on restrictions for medical reasons and I've been bullied for that. Human Resources told me that I couldn't have them or they pushed to know why I had them. Even the director of our department and my supervisor constantly asked why I had them. They resorted to threatening to not honor my restrictions from my doctor if I wouldn't tell them. After a time I couldn't take the constant questions and told them what they wanted to know just to make them stop asking me daily.

Many times since I started I have been physically ill from the stress of working here. The stress of knowing that you are going to walk into a day filled with "grade school style" bullies has had me calling-in sick before. I've cried at the thought of going to work and facing my tormentors day after day. Sometimes, I would sit in my car just staring at the building wondering what it would be today.

When you are being bullied by everyone from the top of management down to your coworkers, it leaves you feeling powerless. My hope is that by telling you my story it will help you understand that this is a problem. Maybe by telling people what happened, it will help other people and eventually, even help me. Bullying happens almost daily to everyone, here at my worksite. It's not something that is talked about, prevented or stopped.

It also seems to me that, unless they are required to, my worksite and my agency will never be willing to admit that workplace bullying happens, or to take any steps to prevent or stop it. It is because of this I ask you recommend passing HB 2200, so that other might not have to go through what I have.