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Testimony in favor of 2019 HB2257 - AN ACT concerning school districts; relating to bullying; requiring adoption of policies prohibiting and preventing bullying; amending K.S.A. 72-6147 and repealing the existing section

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Good afternoon. My name is Lindsay Buck. I live in Lawrence, Kansas where I'm a special education teacher and club sponsor at Lawrence High School, and I'm a mother of two teenagers who attend Free State High School. I'm here today to speak in favor of HB2257, AN ACT concerning school districts; relating to bullying; requiring adoption of policies prohibiting and preventing bullying; amending K.S.A. 72-6147 and repealing the existing section.

I feel very fortunate to work in a district like USD 497: Lawrence Public Schools has adopted thorough policies and frameworks with regards to bullying and non-discrimination, and I am well aware that that might not be the case in many school districts across the state. However, while our policies and frameworks might be fairly sound, I've found that specific plans for bullying prevention are inconsistent at best and lacking at worst.

Students thrive in environments that offer transparency and consistency, which is why publication and visibility of bullying policies and plans would be so beneficial for our school communities. We also need improved policies and procedures that require follow through and accountability by the district. The ways in which schools handle reports of bullying vary from case to case, and from school to school. And for our high schools, which have five administrators each, discipline for bullying could be handled differently depending on which administrator is assigned to the case, leading to inconsistent sanctions for bullying. Furthermore, I've witnessed students lose faith in reporting cases of bullying, because they worry about a) either not being taken seriously and/or b) fearing retaliation from those who are bullying them, especially if the person who they feel bullied by happens to be an adult in the school system. For this reason, students should have easily accessible methods to anonymously report bullying, at both the building and district levels.

Without a doubt, the increase of access to technology in the educational setting has led to the increase of cyberbullying. Over the course of the last three years, our district has implemented 1:1 devices for all secondary students, which provided ipads for middle schoolers and macbooks for high school students. While there are, of course, countless benefits for students having access to technology both in and outside of the school setting, that also means that cyberbullying now has the potential to take place 24/7 for students.

Last year, instances of severe cyberbullying between some LHS students on a group messaging platform called GroupMe ultimately resulted in a student-led sit in that garnered national media attention. Nearly 200 students skipped classes for most of the school day to protest what they perceived as lack of intervention by the administration to address the cyberbullying that had taken place. Many of the students felt the high school environment had become hostile and unsafe, and felt the administration did not meet expectations for keeping students safe in the school environment. The students took to the LHS rotunda, demanding the administration take action to address the bullies' actions, and send a message that bullying of any form would not be permitted in our school environment. I strongly believe that this event

could have been prevented with proper bullying prevention, intervention, and reaction strategies in place.

If schools were required to be accountable for publishing their bullying prevention policies and plans, this would lead to increased transparency for students, families, and communities. Then, if further reform were needed for each schools' bullying policies and plans, the communities could advocate for them locally. However, stakeholders cannot advocate for something that either does not exist, or is not being clearly communicated.

Every child in our great state deserves to attend school without fear of being attacked, harassed, or otherwise threatened. I strongly believe that publishing consistent, transparent bullying prevention plans, and explicit training for faculty and staff around bullying prevention, intervention, and reaction strategies, will help keep our school environments and our students safe.

I appreciate being given the time to speak to you today, to advocate for HB2257. Thank you.