



Support the Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 2262)

AAUW

July 1, 2010

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 100,000 bipartisan members and donors of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to **cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 2262), which was introduced by Representatives Linda T. Sanchez (D-CA), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), and Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY)**. The Safe Schools Improvement Act would require that states, districts, and schools develop policies and programs to prevent and appropriately respond to instances of bullying and harassment. I also urge you to support inclusion of the bill language in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

AAUW firmly believes that the country should provide an excellent education for all children. However, our nation's schools face longstanding challenges in preventing and effectively responding to instances of bullying and harassment. Bullying and harassment interfere with a student's ability to achieve high standards and have a significant impact on GPAs, school attendance, dropout rates, and likelihood of completing college. Simply put, students can't learn if they do not feel safe. In addition, bullying and harassment can lead to more serious school safety problems. Many high profile cases of school violence, even suicide, have been attributed to students who were bullied and harassed in school. Whether based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion, gender identity or any other characteristic, bullying and harassment interfere with students' ability to learn.

Recent research shows that bullying affects nearly one in three American school children in grades six through ten.¹ The Girl Scout Research Institute reports that girls, in particular, are most concerned about their emotional safety.² And, almost a decade ago, AAUW's own research revealed that 83 percent of girls and 79 percent of boys reported having experienced sexual harassment, and over one in four students stated that harassment happens "often."³ What is even more disconcerting is the fact that a National School Boards' Association study found that half of students surveyed stated that they doubted teachers could stop bullying behavior.⁴

Although a limited number of federal laws address particular kinds of harassment, there is no comprehensive law to address bullying and harassment. The Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 2262) would fill a troubling gap in federal education policy. The bill would make sure that states, districts, and schools have in place policies prohibiting bullying and harassment; that schools and districts establish complaint procedures to effectively respond to instances of harassment; and that states include information regarding bullying and harassment in their required drug and violence prevention reports. The Safe Schools Improvement Act would also provide opportunities for states, district, and schools to offer professional development to prevent bullying and harassment, and also to implement student education programs designed to teach students about the issues around, and consequences of, bullying and harassment.

Again, AAUW strongly encourages you to **cosponsor the Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 2262)**, by contacting Angie Mancillas (202/225-6676 or angelina.mancillas@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Sanchez' office. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Tracy Sherman, government relations manager, at 202/785-7730. Cosponsorships or votes associated with these issues may be included in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record for the 111th Congress*.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Maatz
Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

¹ Members of the National Safe Schools Partnership (June 2007). *Bridging the Gap in Federal Law: Promoting Safe School and Improved Student Achievement by Preventing Bullying and Harassment in our Schools*. Retrieved on December 19, 2008, from http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/000/912-1.pdf.

² Judy Schoenberg, Toija Riggins, and Kimberlee Salmond, *Feeling Safe: What Girls Say*, A Report from the Girl Scout Research Institute (New York, NY: Girl Scouts of the USA, 2003).

³ In 1993, AAUW released *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools*, which revealed that four out of five students in grades eight to 11 had experienced some form of sexual harassment. In 2001, the AAUW Educational Foundation released the follow-up report, *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School*, which found that nearly a decade later, sexual harassment remained a major problem and a significant barrier to student achievement in public schools. In response, AAUW developed a resource guide, *Harassment-Free Hallways* (2002), which provides guidelines and recommendations to help schools, students, and parents prevent and combat sexual harassment. All of these publications, including *Drawing the Line*, are available at <http://www.aauw.org/research>.

⁴ Hutton, Thomas. "No Right of Passage: Coming to Grips with Harassment and Bullying." National School Boards Association's *Leadership Insider*, p. 1. August 2006.