
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairwoman McCarthy Statement At Joint Subcommittee
Hearing On Strengthening School Safety through Prevention
of Bullying**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), chairwoman of the Healthy Families and Communities for a joint subcommittee hearing on “Strengthening School Safety through Prevention of Bullying” with the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee.*

I'd like to welcome our witnesses to this hearing on strengthening safety in schools.

As a nurse for over 30 years, I have seen firsthand what violence does to students and their families. I came to Congress as a result of violence, and I have worked for years to prevent it.

Through this hearing we will explore the different areas of concern we have related to school safety and ideas on how to address them.

I want to take a moment to give a special thanks to my colleagues Chairman Kildee and Ranking Members Platts and Castle. Each of you has a great interest in keeping our young people safe and I appreciate all the hard work you have done on this issue and on the hearing.

While the overwhelming number of schools in this country are safe, it is a parent's worst nightmare to send a child to school only to learn that the child has become the victim of a crime or other incident. We see acts of bullying that quickly escalate into outbreaks of violence.

As a parent, knowing your child has been the victim of bullying can be heartbreaking, so too can learning that your child is a bully.

These days, bullying and school violence can have dire consequences. Often, acts of bullying can extend beyond the halls of our school buildings and has found a new home

on the internet. The emotional and physical impacts of bullying have become more severe than ever and we as parents need to be proactive in dealing with this serious problem.

Students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach in environments that are unsafe and frightening. Schools should be sanctuaries for our children to learn and get the tools they need to succeed in life, not places where children have to worry about physical or emotional violence.

Growing up and going to school is hard enough, fear and violence should not be added factors that bring more confusion and stress. Communities and school districts that were once immune to violence are now being forced to confront it head on.

On occasion we have seen students referred to the juvenile justice system for what used to be considered a disciplinary infraction. Something must be done to reverse these trends and protect students and teachers alike.

One of the problems I am concerned about is that we do not know how much violence is actually occurring in schools. Accurate data enables administrators and policy makers to assess the impact of school safety programs.

A 2006 report from my home state of New York highlighted this issue. The New York Comptroller's Office found that at schools they had surveyed more than 80 percent of the documented incidents were not reported to the State, including serious offenses such as sexual assault and the use of a weapon.

There has been much speculation about why there is underreporting. One concern is that labeling a school as dangerous has a terrible stigma and may even be misleading in certain cases. We need to change the labeling. We also need to enhance the source of incident information.

The primary source of federal school crime and violence data is the annual, "Indicators of School Crime and Safety," report. The Indicators report is based on surveys and research, but does not include law enforcement data. While the current data available is valuable, I believe it must be enhanced.

A 5 year study by the FBI on crime in schools and colleges was released in October 2007. This study emphasized the contribution incident-based data can bring to the table when we are looking at crime in schools. Without objection I would like to submit a copy of this report for the record.

By increasing the accuracy of school violence reporting, we can make sure federal dollars are going to those schools that truly need it most. I am also working to allocate federal dollars for local school emergency preparedness planning.

This is why I will be reintroducing legislation that calls for more accuracy, accountability and transparency in the reporting requirements for school safety.

Another theme that I think is important and that you will hear running through this hearing is that effective safety efforts must include a thought and input between a variety of interested parties, especially the students. The students know what's happening to them and to their peers, and often before adults do. They are critical partners in any school safety efforts and I look forward to hearing ideas this.

Violence and bullying prevention is necessary to a successful academic career. We need to take these threats seriously and we must act on them to prevent further tragedies.

Thank you all for being here and I look forward to your testimony.

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