



**Written Testimony of the American Association of University Women
(AAUW) of Michigan**

before the

Michigan Civil Rights Commission

Forum on Bullying

Cadillac Place, 3054 W. Grand Boulevard, Detroit, MI 48202

January 25, 2011

Good afternoon. My name is Barbara Bonsignore and I am the Public Policy Director of AAUW of Michigan. I appreciate the opportunity to give testimony on the subject of bullying and harassment.

AAUW is a membership organization founded 130 years ago and has approximately 100,000 members and 1000 branches nationwide. We break through barriers for women and girls and believe all students deserve safe learning environments. AAUW of Michigan has approximately 3,000 members and 43 branches throughout the state.

Public 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. In addition, bullying and harassment can lead to even greater safety problems.

Sexual harassment is a type of harassment and AAUW has released several research reports on this topic including *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.

The following are some startling statistics about the prevalence of bullying and harassment in schools.

- **Close to half of all children are bullied at some point while they are at primary or secondary school.ⁱ**
- **In Michigan, 24 percent of high school students reported being bullied on school property in the prior year.ⁱⁱ**
- **7.4 percent of high school students reported missing school because they felt unsafe. In Detroit, 19.1 percent of students reported missing school because they felt unsafe.ⁱⁱⁱ**

The definition of harassment that is commonly used and is used in legislation pending in Congress is: conduct that adversely affects the ability of one or more students to participate in or benefit from the school's educational programs or activities because the conduct, as reasonably perceived by the student (or students), is so severe, persistent, or pervasive; and includes conduct that is based on-

(i) a student's actual or perceived race; color; national origin; sex; disability; sexual orientation; gender identity; or religion;

(ii) any other distinguishing characteristics that may be defined by a State or local educational agency; or

(iii) association with a person or group with one or more of the actual or perceived characteristics listed in clause (i) or (ii).

Bullying is a type of harassment that unfortunately places the student (or students) in reasonable fear of physical harm.

On October 26, 2010 the Department of Education in Washington, DC issued guidance in an effort to support educators in combating bullying and harassment in schools and clarified that a school's response, or lack of response, when a student is bullied or harassed may violate federal education anti-discrimination laws, such as Title IX.

Title IX protects students from unlawful sexual harassment in all of a school's programs or activities, whether they take place in the facilities of the school, on a school bus, at a class or training program sponsored by the school at another location, or elsewhere. Title IX protects both male and female students from sexual harassment, regardless of who the harasser might be.

In conclusion, all children must have a safe environment in which to learn. It is encouraging that attention is being paid to the problem of bullying and that both national and state departments of education are attempting to help educators better understand their obligations, while providing resources to allow prompt and effective action to be taken in an effort to end harassment and bullying in schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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Note: This is a short version of the text of the testimony written to comply with the 3-5 minute limit on presentations. Anyone wishing to obtain the longer, more detailed text may contact Barbara at bjbaauw1@aol.com and it will be provided in a pdf file.

ⁱ American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. (May 2008). *Facts for Families on Bullying*. Accessed November 2, 2010, from http://www.aacap.org/galleries/FactsForFamilies/80_bullying.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (4 June 2010). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance- United States 2009 Table 17*. Surveillance Summaries, MMWR 2010;59 (No. SS-5). Retrieved December 28, 2010, from <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5905a1.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (4 June 2010). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance- United States 2009 Table 19*. Surveillance Summaries, MMWR 2010;59 (No. SS-5). Retrieved December 28, 2010, from <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5905a1.htm>