



**SPECIAL SENATE COMMISSION TO STUDY
AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS
RELATED TO THE PROBLEM OF
CYBERTHREATS, CYBERBULLYING,
BULLYING, AND SEXTING**

Report Submitted to the

Rhode Island Senate

March 2011

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1. 2010- S 2871A – A Senate Resolution Creating a Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying, Bullying, and Sexting
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**Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to
the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying, Bullying, and Sexting**

Commission Members

Senator John J. Tassoni, Jr.

Chairman

D-Dist. 22, North Smithfield, Smithfield

Senator Beatrice A. Lanzi

Co-Chairwoman

D-Dist. 26, Cranston

Representative Deborah Ruggiero

D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown

Haiganush R. Bedrosian

Chief Judge of the Rhode Island Family Court

Cynthia Richard

Dean, LaSalle Academy

Gina Picard

Principal, Robert F. Kennedy School

Dr. Jacqueline Striano

Assistant Principal, Western Hills Middle School

Lieutenant Nicholas Tella (designee)

Rhode Island State Police, Computer Crime Unit

Catherine M. Pleau (designee)

Smithfield Public Schools, Assistant Principal, V.J. Gallagher Middle School

Dr. Lawrence P. Filippelli

Assistant Superintendent, Scituate Public Schools

Christine Caron

Program Director, TalkWorks

Staff

Anne Marie DeMello

Policy Analyst

Nancy Sullivan

Commission Clerk

Karyn Lowe

Policy Analyst II

Brenden Oates

Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Senate



Rhode Island Senate

On behalf of the Commission, I am pleased to present these findings and recommendations of the Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying, Bullying, and Sexting. This report represents the best thinking of a distinguished and dedicated Commission. Over the course of several hearings, Commission members heard informed and often compelling testimony, from parents, students, teachers, school administrators, and experts regarding the dangers of cyberthreats, bullying, cyberbullying, and sexting.

With the advent of the internet, cell phones, web cams, social network sites, and other means of electronic communication, the ability for bullying to do harm has increased and the ability of parents and policymakers to combat it has been challenged. Cyberbullying is an extension of face-to-face bullying, with communication technology providing bullies with a faster and sometimes anonymous route to harass their targets.

The Commission further examined the issue of 'sexting' – the use of electronic devices, such as a cell phone, to distribute pictures or video of sexually explicit images or text messages of a sexually-charged nature. Children, particularly adolescents, are exposed to sexuality at an alarming rate during a critical time in their social, emotional, and physical development. Many do not understand the consequences of their actions – what might seem like an intimate and harmless 'flirt' with a boyfriend or girlfriend can quickly spread to hundreds of peers and become nearly impossible to control through electronic distribution.

Ultimately, our study found that bullying is a serious public policy issue and that schools throughout Rhode Island have diverse bullying policies. Next, the Commission identified that social networking sites have enabled bullying to occur at all times, all days and all places. Finally, the Commission found that law enforcement lack adequate laws to appropriately respond to severe cyberbullying and sexting.

We are grateful to every member of the Commission for their willingness to take part in these discussions and appreciate the many experts who took time to appear before the Commission. In particular, we wish to share our deepest gratitude and sympathy with the parents of children whose lives were impacted, or who lost their lives, because of bullying and cyberbullying. We dedicate this report and the work of this Commission to them.

Sincerely,

Senator John J. Tassoni Jr.
District 22 – Smithfield, North Smithfield

Background

On May 26, 2010, Senate Bill 2387subA was read and passed by the Rhode Island Senate creating the Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying, Bullying, and Sexting. More than 26,000 Rhode Island middle and high school students have reported that they have experienced some form of bullying.¹ The eleven-member Commission, chaired by Senator John J. Tassoni Jr. (District-22, Smithfield, North Smithfield) was authorized to study and make recommendations to the Senate relating to the problem of cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting.

The Commission consisted of elected officials, representatives from the State Police, school superintendents, public high school teachers, private high school teachers, nonprofits organizations, the Family Court system, and experts from throughout state government. Each member of the Commission, along with others who provided testimony, presentations, opinions, and assistance to the Commission, has been instrumental in preparing this document throughout the series of hearings and commission meetings.

The Commission met seven times over the past seven months: September 9, 2010; October 14, 2010; October 28, 2010; December 2, 2010; February 10, 2011; February 17, 2011; and March 15, 2011; and was charged with presenting its findings and recommendations to the Senate on or before March 31, 2011. This document represents the final report of the Special Senate Commission.

¹ 2010 SurveyWorks! administered by the Rhode Island Department of Education

Time Line of the Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying, Bullying, and Sexting

- September 9, 2010 – Room 313, State House
 - Organizational meeting of the Commission
 - Presentations by:
 - Lawrence P. Filippelli, Ed. D, Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Scituate, Robert K. Gable, Ed. D, Director; Center for Research and Evaluation, Stacey L. Kite, Professor, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

- October 14, 2010– Smithfield High School Library
 - Speakers:
 - Judge Kathleen Voccola- RI Family Court, Sgt. Ken Bell- RI State Police, Computer Crimes Unit, Margaret Gallagher –Elmer- Smithfield High School- School Psychologist, Joseph Marcello- Smithfield High School Resource Officer
 - Public Testimony

- October 28, 2010 – Western Hills Middle School
 - Speakers:
 - Mr. Peter Nero- Superintendent of Cranston Public Schools, Cranston High School Students, Andrea Iannazzi- Cranston School Committee, Cranston Teacher Panel: Ms. Julie Baker, Mr. Matthew Reis, Ms. Barbara Bianco, Ms. Kristen Capaldi, Ms. Suzanne Meyer, Ms. Kelly Starliper-Morris, Mr. Paul Perentin, Mr. Paul DePalma (Cranston West Assistant Principal), Cranston Public Schools Director of Guidance Mrs. Leslie Conley and Mr. Michael DelRosso (school psychologist)
 - Public Testimony

- December 2, 2010 – North Providence High School Library
 - Speakers:
 - Peter and Debbie Michalenka- Parents, North Providence Superintendent- Donna Ottaviano, Ed. D., North Providence High School Principal- Mr. Joseph Goho and Assistant Principals Ms. Christine Magill and Mr. Wayne Talbot, District Coordinator for the Anti-bullying Task Force- Tonianne Moniz; Assistant Principal, Birchwood Middle School, Birchwood Middle School Students, Sojourner House Program Director- Kate Reilly
 - Public Testimony

- February 10, 2011 – North Smithfield Middle School
 - Speakers:
 - Mr. Stephen F. Lindberg-North Smithfield Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Magee- Assistant Principal, Mr. Peter Sanchioni-Natick M.A., Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Andy Zitoli-Millis M.A., Millis Middle School, Principal, Ann Burke- President, Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund, Denise Panichas- Executive Director, The Samaritans of R.I.
 - Public Testimony

- February 17, 2011 – LaSalle Academy Library
 - Speakers:
 - Kevin Robinson-Motivational Speaker, Veronica Baron- Senior at Lincoln High School in Providence; formed The R.E.A.L. Team
 - Public Testimony

- March 15, 2011- RM. 313, State House
 - Review of Legislation
 - Review of Report

FINDINGS

1. Cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting affect students at all grade levels in Rhode Island schools.

During the course of the Commission's seven hearings, administrators, teachers, parents and students testified that bullying and cyberbullying took place within their schools. The Commission heard testimony from individuals from all grade levels in elementary, middle and high school as well as from urban, suburban and rural communities. Many schools have developed programs that have created a student movement to identify, intervene and inform when bullying occurs. These individual schools have created a positive environment that not only embraces differences among its student population but also empowers students to state that bullying will not be tolerated. While these individual school programs have had success in their own school, not all schools, even within the same school district, have such programs. The Commission finds that cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting affect students in Rhode Island schools at all grade levels.

2. Schools and school departments have varying policies regarding cyber threats, cyber bullying, bullying and sexting.

Currently, Rhode Island General Laws §16-21-26 requires all public school districts to create and adopt a school bullying policy. The unintended consequence of this legislation is that each school district or school has its own policy to deter bullying with various definitions of harassment, bullying and intimidation and also differing approaches to violations of the anti-bullying policy. Some policies are very detailed with procedures that parent, teachers, staff and administration can follow in the event that a child is being bullied, while others are not clearly defined.

3. Social networking sites, texting and other uses of technology have enabled bullying to occur any time, any day and any place.

During the Commission meetings that occurred throughout Rhode Island, the testimony provided the members of the Commission with a clear understanding that bullying does not take place solely at school during school hours. Students' use of social networking sites and texting has provided a forum for students to continue bullying once the school day is over. Students testified that negative, threatening, or cruel posts on social networking sites were available online for all students and classmates to view and comment on. Those students who were bullied during school, now had to endure the continued taunting throughout the remainder of the day and weekends.

In addition, school administrators and teachers testified that the use of social networking sites and text messaging for bullying has had an adverse impact on students' attendance, academic performance and overall classroom participation. School administrators testified many hours of the school day is spent addressing these types of bullying situations.

Overall, the testimony revealed that these types of constant tormenting have taken a toll, especially on those students who have been bullied over an extended period of time. Such students have not felt safe and secure in their school environment. Accordingly, the Commission finds that the use of social networking sites, texting and other technology has enabled bullying to occur constantly.

4. Rhode Island lacks adequate laws to address severe cyber bullying or sexting infractions.

Under current state law, no crime is defined in a manner that can appropriately address the situations that rise above the purview of school administrators. For example, if a minor student posted a sexually explicit image of another student, the only criminal charge that the posting minor could be charged with is disseminating child pornography. This crime is a felony that upon conviction would require sex offender registration. The Commission found that this punishment does not fit the crime; however, the student should have some consequences to his or her actions.

Testimony before the Commission revealed that a majority of bullying and cyberbullying incidents can be resolved by school administrators, parents and the students. Some incidents involving bullying, cyberbullying and sexting, however, require law enforcement involvement. Currently, law enforcement's options for intervention in these cases are to either, not charge the student with any crime, or charge that student with a felony that will follow him/her throughout his or her life.

The Commission finds that legislation is needed to appropriately address the situation where a minor has published sexually explicit images.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Require the Rhode Island Department of Education to draft one comprehensive, unified and responsive plan that addresses cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting in schools.

Each of the 36 school districts in Rhode Island presently has a unique bullying policy. Through testimony and presentations from administrators, teachers, parents and students it became clear that various school districts' policies created ineffective and inconsistent policies and enforcement. As a result, bullying remained a problem for several Rhode Island schools. Rhode Island General Laws § 16-2-17 provides, "Each student, staff member, teacher and administrator has a right to attend and/or work at a school which is safe and secure and which is conducive to learning, and which is free from threat, actual or implied, of physical harm by a disruptive student." In order to assist in providing all students and school employees with a safe environment, the Commission recommends that one statewide policy is needed to effectively address cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting, and that said policy be provided to the Senate President upon completion.

2. Require all Rhode Island schools, public and nonpublic, to adopt the state plan to address cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting.

As discussed above, all Rhode Island students, school staff members, teachers and administrators have a right to a safe and secure work and/or learning environment regardless of whether a student attends a public or nonpublic school. Likewise, students who transfer schools who themselves have challenges "fitting in" deserve the guarantee that bullying will be prevented and addressed. The importance of this issue transcends the boundary between public, private, charter, vocational or collaborative schools. As such, the Commission recommends that the state plan to address cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting apply to all Rhode Island schools.

3. Provide school administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students with information, guidance and access to the state plan to address cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting.

Throughout the seven hearings, the Commission heard testimony from parents and teachers who were frustrated because they did not know what to do about a child who was being bullied. While all Rhode Island schools must have a bullying policy, not all parents, teachers or students were aware of the procedures to follow once a child was being bullied. It is the recommendation of this Commission that the Rhode Island Department of Education for Secondary and Elementary Education provide administrators with the state plan to address cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting. Each school district or school shall provide a copy of the policy to teachers, parents and students and/or provide a link to the policy on the school's website. Also, administrators shall provide teachers, staff and parents with guidance and information on bullying and the procedures to follow in the event that a student is being bullied.

4. Access and use of social networking sites shall not be allowed at school unless expressly authorized by the appropriate school authority and provided that the access must be for educational or instructional purposes.

While use of social networking sites can be a valuable education tool, the wide spread use of these sites for cyberbullying and other abusive noneducational purposes, are disruptive to a safe and secure learning environment. Some school administrations throughout the state have banned the access and use of social networking sites at school while others have been silent. Because of the propensity for disrupting the learning environment, the Commission recommends that the access and use of social networking sites be prohibited except where expressly authorized by the appropriate school official and solely for educational purposes.

5. Design laws that adequately and appropriately address cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting when events rise to the level that is appropriate for law enforcement involvement.

Currently, Rhode Island General Laws does not contain any offense for a minor to be charged with if the minor's conduct - in the context of cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying and sexting - warrants further action beyond that which school officials are authorized to address. Law enforcement has requested that the legislature consider laws specifically providing criminal offenses related to cyberthreats, bullying, cyberbullying and sexting by minors which can be referred to the Family Court when appropriate. Also, law enforcement has asked that the legislature consider creating a similar criminal offense for adults (18 years or older). The Commission recommends that the legislature consider the approval of said legislation.

Addendum 1 : Senate Resolution

2010 -- S 2871 SUBSTITUTE A

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LC02625/SUB A
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2010

SENATE RESOLUTION

**CREATING A SPECIAL SENATE COMMISSION TO STUDY AND MAKE
RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE PROBLEM OF CYBERTHREATS,
CYBERBULLYING, BULLYING, AND SEXTING**

Introduced By: Senator John J. Tassoni

Date Introduced: May 12, 2010

Referred To: Senate Constitutional & Regulatory Issues

- 1-1 RESOLVED, That a special Senate commission be and the same is hereby created
1-2 consisting of eleven (11) members: three (3) of whom shall be members of the Senate, not more
1-3 than two (2) from the same political party, to be appointed by the President of the Senate; one of

1-4 whom shall represent the Rhode Island State Police Computer Crimes Unit, to be appointed by
1-5 the Colonel of the Rhode Island State Police; one of whom shall be the Superintendent of Schools
1-6 for Smithfield, or designee; one of whom shall be the Superintendent of Schools for Scituate, or
1-7 designee; one of whom shall be the Superintendent of Schools for Cranston, or designee; one of
1-8 whom shall be a teacher from a Rhode Island public high school, to be appointed by the President
1-9 of the Senate; one of whom shall be a representative from TalkWorks, to be appointed by the
1-10 President of the Senate; one of whom shall be a teacher from a private high school in the State of
1-11 Rhode Island, to be appointed by the President of the Senate; and one of whom shall be the Chief
1-12 Judge of the Rhode Island Family Court, or designee.

1-13 The purpose of said commission shall be to study and make recommendations to the
1-14 Senate relating to the problem of cyberthreats, cyberbullying, bullying, and sexting.

1-15 Upon passage of this resolution, the members of the commission shall meet at the call of
1-16 the President of the Senate and organize. The chairperson shall be appointed by the President of
1-17 the Senate. Vacancies in said commission shall be filled in like manner as the original
1-18 appointment.

1-19 The membership of said commission shall receive no compensation for their services.

2-1 All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish such advice and information,
2-2 documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or
2-3 desirable by the commission to facilitate the purposes of this resolution.

2-4 The Joint Committee on Legislative Services is hereby authorized and directed to provide
2-5 suitable quarters for said commission unless said commission has secured suitable quarters on its
2-6 own and at no expense to the State of Rhode Island.

2-7 The special study commission shall hold at least four meetings throughout the state to
2-8 hear testimony from experts, students, teachers, parents, and members of the public; and be it
2-9 further

- 2-10 RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the
2-11 Senate on or before March 31, 2011, and said commission shall expire on April 28, 2011.

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LC02625/SUB A

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Addendum 2 : Minutes



SENATE POLICY OFFICE MEMORANDUM

*State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Senate Policy Office, Room SB27
State House, Providence, RI 02903*

TO: The Honorable John J. Tassoni, Jr.
Chair

FROM: Anne Marie DeMello, Senate Policy Analyst

DATE: September 9, 2010

SUBJECT: **Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyber threats, Cyber bullying, and Sexting, September 9, 2010**

The following is a synopsis of the Senate Commission, which was held on Thursday September 9, 2010.

1. Welcome and Call to Order

2. Introductions

Chair John J. Tassoni, Jr., welcomed everyone and explained the severity of cyber bullying. He then had the members introduce themselves.

3. Presentation

Chair Tassoni opened the meeting and welcomed Dr. Lawrence P. Filippelli, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Scituate School Department, to present on cyber bullying.

Dr. Filippelli presented; Practicing Internet and Texting Safety, Preventing Cyber bullying and Proper Online Etiquette,
- Available upon request.

Dr. Filippelli then shows the room how easy it is for a predator to visit my space by age and zip code. And, how you can then choose (a young lady) and see where she will be and when just by the information she has posted.

Dr. Filippelli explains how we can't underestimate the learning tools with twitter and computers, but how we need precautions. Children are giving out a lot of personal information free, 24 hours a day, with no log in or pass word needed. We need community and police involvement.

The second presenter introduces herself as **Stacey Kite**, professor at Johnson & Wales University.

Stacey Kite presented; Research on Internet Behavior, with Dr.'s Filippelli and Gable, referring to data explaining the information age.

- Available upon request.

Dr. Robert K. Gable of Johnson & Wales University, shares 2 years of data showing how middle school and high school students don't see the threats of computer socializing and, how fewer high school students parents have their children's pass words.

Dr. Gable concludes with the statement, "There is a relationship between being bullied and achievement in the class room".

Senator Tassoni, asked Dr. Gable, "what is your opinion on where this commission should go, what next, should there be a curriculum starting at 3rd grade, and how many children have phones and computers"?

Dr. Filippelli, answers that what is needed is multi-faceted,

1. an educational component, educate schools, children and parents
2. give educators and police more teeth
3. balance is needed, not overly restricted

Commission member, **Christine Caron** thanks the presenters and agrees with their data and its inaccurate numbers.

Commission member, **Dr. Jacqueline Striano** believes that films and presentations are educational, and that children should be responsible for their actions.

Commission member, **Gina Picard** was glad that Senator Tassoni mentioned the 3rd grade being included in needing education on these subjects. That she has experienced the young children using face book and taking pictures in school and putting them on the computer when they get home.

Commission member, **Judge Bedrosian** asked Senator Tassoni what bill did they try to pass last year.

Senator Tassoni, asked commission member Lt. Tella, do the police have administrative support to get IP addresses?

4. Presentation

Dr. Midge Sabatini, RIDE, introduced herself and presented; School Safety/ Bullying

- Available upon request

Senator Tassoni asked Dr. Sabatini if they get any money from the federal government for bullying programs, such as Title 4 Part A.

Dr. Sabatini responds that this no money available through Title 4. That programs such as DARE, had proven to be ineffective.

Senator Tassoni asked Dr. Sabatini if the members could get RIDE's survey questions.

- Available upon request

5. Discussions of future meetings

Senator Tassoni explains that the commission will be going to various schools in the state over the next few months.



SENATE POLICY OFFICE MEMORANDUM

*State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Senate Policy Office, Room SB27
State House, Providence, RI 02903*

TO: The Honorable John J. Tassoni, Jr.
Chair

FROM: Anne Marie DeMello, Senate Policy Analyst

DATE: October 14, 2010

SUBJECT: Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyber threats, Cyber bullying, and Sexting, September 9, 2010

The following is a synopsis of the Senate Commission, which was held on Thursday October 14, 2010.

Senator Tassoni addressed staff and made a request.

1. Welcome and Call to Order

2. Introductions

Chair John J. Tassoni, Jr., welcomed everyone and introduced Judge Kathleen Voccola to testify.

3. Speakers

Chair Tassoni opened the meeting and welcomed Judge Kathleen Voccola Family Court Judge, to present on cyber bullying.

Judge Voccola spoke of RI being the model statute for cyber bullying and explained the restraining order statute and how Family Court has jurisdiction over all restraining orders for juveniles.

Judge Voccola stated that cyber stalking needs to be addressed within the statute. And, that an avenue that should be explored is outreach.

Senator Tassoni, asked Judge Voccola, “what does family court need to do”?

Judge Voccola, answers that the statute needs to be looked at.

Senator Tassoni introduces Sgt. Ken Bell, RI State Police, Computer Crimes Unit.

Sgt. Ken Bell states that he will cover,

1. The need for legislation and
 2. The past two year's statistics of cyber bullying.
- Testimony available

Senator Tassoni, asked Sgt. Bell, "A legislative package, when submitted to the department of administration, who decides where it goes"?

Sgt. Bell responds, "I would like to defer that to Lt. Tella".

Commission member, **Lt. Tella** answers the Governor's office. **Lt. Tella** asks Sgt. Bell, "What are the steps to investigate the date and time in question"?

Sgt. Bell answers, you identify the IP address, name, address, and phone number. And, you fax the administrative subpoena (police have the power to subpoena the provider)".

Chairman Tassoni, asks Sgt. Bell, "Are you under staffed at the computer crimes unit task force"?

Sgt. Bell responds that they are always reaching out for police to join the task force and be trained.

Commission member, **Judge Bedrosian** says that she applauds the work done by the computer crimes unit.

Senator Tassoni introduces Margaret Gallagher-Elmer, Smithfield High School, School Psychologist.

Margaret Gallagher-Elmer shares a story about girls in school and what happens with miscommunication.
Testimony available.

Senator Tassoni asked Margaret Gallagher-Elmer, "What is the rule on phones in school"?

Ms. Elmer responds that NO phones are allowed in school.

Commission member, **Lt. Tella** asks Ms. Elmer, regarding phone control, how often does this happen at school?

Ms. Elmer responds that it happens 1-2 times a week. That it takes up a lot of resources of the school to handle this.

Commission member, **Judge Bedrosian** asks Ms. Elmer "is there a protocol"?

Ms. Elmer answers yes.

Senator Tassoni introduces Officer Joseph Marcello, resource officer.

Officer Marcello explains how children of all ages are being harassed at school. And, how outside incidents with the students come into the school.

Testimony available.

-Professional testimony

John Reis introduces him self as a retired police Lt. and, as president of PAVE – Partnership to Address Violence through Education.

Mr. Reis begins by affirmatively stating, “Get the phones out of schools”! Asking the members and audience why aren’t we going after parents, after all the phones are in the parent’s names?

Testimony available.

Senator Tassoni, addressing Mr. Reis states that we can’t even get the parents to come to these hearings. **The chairman** invites Lt. Reis to come with us through the state to speak.

Commission member, **Lt. Tella** addresses Lt. Reis making the statements,

- your against criminalization
- sanctions create deterrents
- possession of child pornography is all we can charge these kids with.

Chief Brian Sullivan, Lincoln Police Department; represented RI Police Chief Association, introduced **David Waycott**, Lincoln resource officer.

Chief Sullivan explained how a phony face book account was created with a phony e-mail address. That there were 200-300 responses in two days, all to insult kids and post pictures to humiliate. It took 3-4 days for face book to close this site down.

Testimony available.

Senator Tassoni announces that he is opening the microphone for public testimony.

-Public Testimony

Christine Dufault, parent of a high school boy in Lincoln shares personal stories about her son and his experiences with being bullied.

Senator Tassoni thanks Ms. Dufault for coming and testifying.

Stacey Kite, Johnson and Wales Professor, explains the statistics on parents and their involvement with their children and the computer. How the numbers go from 33% of parents are monitoring – down to 17% depending on age. The older children are less monitored.

Leslie Gerundio, parent of a high school girl, shares her frustration and fear regarding her daughter being bullied now for 3 years.

Commission member, **Lt. Tella** refers Mrs. Gerundio to Sgt. Bell to help her.

Richard Iannitelli of the Smithfield School Committee, suggests that the Commission should look at how outside situations roll into the schools causing more havoc.

James Robinson, the director of Youth Pride, explains that nationally 86% of gay and lesbian children are being harassed. He then shared stories about these children.

Marianne Douglas, President, Horizon Enterprises tells the members and audience that she has set up classes around the country to give tools to children on how to protect themselves from bullying and how not to be the child who bullies. The curriculum for this class is in her book, *Strategies for Success*.

Senator Tassoni, asks Ms. Douglas if she has sent this curriculum to RIDE?

Marianne Douglas answers, yes.

Senator Tassoni makes a request to staff.

4. Discussions of Future Meetings

Senator Tassoni announces that the next meeting will be Thursday, October 28th at Western Hills from 5:30-8p.m.

Chairman Tassoni thanks the police and everyone for coming.

5. Adjournment



SENATE POLICY OFFICE MEMORANDUM

*State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Senate Policy Office, Room SB27
State House, Providence, RI 02903*

TO: The Honorable John J. Tassoni, Jr.
FROM: Karyn M. Lowe, Senate Policy Analyst
DATE: October 28, 2010

SUBJECT: Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying and Sexting, October 28, 2010

The following is a synopsis of the Senate Commission, which was held on Thursday, October 28, 2010 at the Western Hills Middle School in Cranston, RI.

Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Senator John T. Tassoni, Jr. called the meeting to order at 5:51 and welcomed everyone. Chairman Tassoni introduced Mr. Peter Nero, Superintendent of Cranston Public Schools.

Mr. Peter Nero, Superintendent of Cranston Public Schools

Mr. Peter Nero, Superintendent of Cranston Public Schools, discussed the culture in school today was shaped by two events, Columbine and Big Dan's rape case. The Columbine School tragedy brought to light the effects of bullying on our students. Big Dan's rape case highlighted the mentality that "if it is not me doing it, it is all right," and the outcome of the trial created a duty to report.

Mr. Nero discussed his anti-bullying speech that takes place every quarter and highlights every student's right to an education free of fear and a students' duty to report bullying that they witness. The introduction of cell phones and the internet became the enemy, however. Students could no longer escape harassment. Because the internet provided a 'faceless' way to communicate, bullying/harassment became much easier.

Mr. Nero introduced students from Cranston High School's Diversity Team.

Slide show and presentation by Cranston High School Students on Bullying

The Cranston High School students explained how they created a student commission that held assemblies entitled "Names Can Hurt Us." They took their idea before the school committee and members of the school committee wanted to get involved. The anti bullying team performed for the school demonstrating how the Victim, Perpetrator, Bystander and Ally play a role in the lives of students. The students played a video of the performance for the Commission to view. The

students raised their own money and performed at other schools. Chairman Tassoni thanked the students for their time and effort. Senator Lanzi told the students how proud she was of their initiative and the positive impact they have on their peers.

Andrea Iannazzi, Vice-Chair of the Cranston School Committee

Andrea Iannazzi, Vice-Chair of the Cranston School Committee, thanked the Commission and congratulated the Cranston High students for a great presentation. Ms. Iannazzi explained the week-long Diversity Awareness Program. During “diversity week,” students watched presentations from community leaders, including Senate President Paiva-Weed, local businesses and fellow students. Students became engaged by the dialogue.

Chairman Tassoni asked Mr. Nero what his opinion was on cell phones. Mr. Nero would like to see legislation that is “real and enforceable.” The legislation can’t be zero tolerance nor can it be left up to the school districts.

Cranston Teacher Panel/Presentation

Julie Baker – High School Spanish Teacher – discussed how Diversity week was a morale builder because of the coordinated effort among teachers, students and the community. Support within the community made it easier to bring culture into the curriculum. It was ok to be different. Also, Ms. Baker said that students became leaders within the school. When those students described their stories and cried in front of an audience of fellow students, the message was very powerful. Chairman Tassoni asked Ms. Baker if there were more students notifying teachers of bullying. Ms. Baker indicated that more students came forward about bullying incidents.

A Special Needs Instructor from Cranston testified about autism awareness program that was held during diversity week and that a pilot basketball program was developed that had special needs students and students participate and play together. The program was so successful that they now have a volleyball team. In response to a question about whether a social skills class was needed among students in school, the teacher indicated yes.

Kristen Capaldi discussed that class advisors stay with the class from freshmen year through senior year so that the students have access to one or two teachers throughout all four years of high school.

Assistant Principal Paul DePalma discussed the bullying policy and what discipline took place after an incident of bullying. Once Mr. DePalma determined what happened, when and where, the student was called in. The disciplinary actions applied to a student are detention, suspension and expulsion with parent involvement at all levels. Mr. DePalma also described a debate that was held during diversity week about immigration. A member of the staff was assigned to each side of the debate, and it showed students that people can disagree respectfully. Dr. Fillipelli asked about bullying legislation, Mr. DePalma stated that it was important to have laws that address the student who continues to bully after the internal punishments. Having the police involved is a strong statement. He also would like to see a definition to address cyber bullying.

Leslie Conley, an elementary guidance counselor, provided the Commission with a handout entitled Cranston Public Schools Elementary Guidance. She explained that bullying lessons were built into the curriculum from Kindergarten through Grade 6. A parent brochure was

developed regarding cyber bullying and texting. Among other things, the program helped to arm students with strategies to combat bullying.

Mr. Michael DelRosso, a school therapist, stated that we can't forget the bully. Students are not born bullies. We have to figure out what is making them act aggressively. Also, as part of a bullying incident, he requires the student to "make amends" with the victim. He also stated that it isn't the schools job to have harsher punishments; it is their role to educate.

Chairman Tassoni opened the floor for Public Testimony

Several members of the public testified before the Commission with various comments, stories and suggestions. The suggestions were as follows:

- Make parents of repeat offenders responsible in some manner.
- One parent would like diversity program and bullying policy brought to the elementary level.
- A child advocate testified that a standard definition of bullying is needed, as well as parental involvement required and resources to assist the bully.
- Bring the parent to court for enabling bullying much like the penalty for supplying alcohol to a minor.
- Educate parents about beginning lessons at home and bullying education must start at the preschool level.

Chairman Tassoni thanked everyone for their attendance. Capitol television will be airing this commission numerous times on Channel 35 Verizon and Channel 15 on Cox.

The Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying, Bullying and Sexting adjourned at 8:17.

Thank you very much. If you would like any further information on any matter discussed, please contact the Senate Policy Office.



SENATE POLICY OFFICE MEMORANDUM

*State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Senate Policy Office, Room SB27
State House, Providence, RI 02903*

TO: The Honorable John J. Tassoni, Jr.

FROM: Anne Marie DeMello, Senate Policy Analyst

DATE: December 2, 2010

SUBJECT: Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying and Sexting, December 2, 2010

The following is a synopsis of the Senate Commission, which was held on Thursday, December 2, 2010 at the North Providence High School in North Providence, RI.

Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Senator John T. Tassoni, Jr. called the meeting to order at 6:15 and welcomed everyone and introduced in the audience, Councilman Dino Autiello, Councilwoman Kristen Catanzaro and Councilwoman at Large Alice Brady. Chairman Tassoni introduced Peter and Deb Michalenka, parents.

Mr. Peter Michalenka and Mrs. Deb Michalenka

Mr. and Mrs. Michalenka share a personal story about their son's experience with being bullied and the associated death. The Michalenka's explained the work they are doing to fight cyber bullying (www.nationalstopbullyingday.webs.com). (Hand outs were given)

Chairman Tassoni introduces Donna Ottaviano, Ed. D., North Providence Superintendent

Donna Ottaviano, North Providence Superintendent

Superintendent Ottaviano states that this commission is an excellent strategy to highlight and think about what we need to do. **Dr. Ottaviano** defines what bullying means according to Webster's Dictionary and addresses how the bullying issues are now two-fold (testimony available).

Senator Tassoni asks Donna Ottaviano what kind of legislation she would like to see.

Dr. Ottaviano responds that she would like to see legislation that does not limit or mandate us to address the issue and the leeway of how to notify the police. She stated that she would also want the school to work in conjunction with the community to address the issue of bullying.

Superintendent Ottaviano introduces North Providence High School Principal **Joseph Goho** And then thanks all the members, Senator Tassoni and the speakers.

Principal Goho first states that they are a zero tolerance school and explains that zero tolerance in school implies that the consequences for a look would be the same as for an action.

Mr. Goho explained that bullying from outside spills over into the school day taking up a lot of school time and man power. He expressed the great need for a state wide bullying policy and that the visible presence of No. Providence police officers are a powerful deterrent for students.

Senator Tassoni asks Principal Goho what social networking policy would you like to see.

Mr. Goho expresses the need for flexibility to handle things proactively. That mandates from K-12 would be welcome and agreed with however, this would come without funding. **Principal Goho** also states the need for a discipline code package and the presence of the North Providence police at the school.

Chairman Tassoni asks Principal Goho what he would think about mandating the parents to come in and listen to a presentation on bullying and cyber bullying.

Principal Goho says they have a mandate for students in sports and their parents to listen to a presentation on healthy living and they could integrate bullying information into that.

Senator Tassoni asks Dr. Ottaviano, what about an on-line presentation (webinar) for parents?

Dr. Ottaviano explains that with a mandate you have to track whether it is being viewed or not.

Representative Ruggiero asks Principal Goho if he has a bullying policy in school.

Principal Goho responds that he has an outline of their policy which specifies,

- zero tolerance
- who is the victim and who is the perpetrator
- gather with families to resolve the bullying incident

Representative Ruggiero asks Mr. Joseph Goho what his thoughts are regarding holding the parents accountable.

Mr. Joseph Goho states that what he believes would help would be having the police visibly present in the schools.

Dr. Filippelli directs his question to principal Goho, asking how much time in the day do you spend dealing with the kids and the problem of bullying?

Principal Goho responds that it is an everyday occurrence and that the faculty's focus is distracted because of it. He also notes that they have many good programs in the district on all levels.

Mr. Goho then introduces **Assistant Principal Christine Magill**.

Christine Magill expresses what she would like to see happen state wide. A kindergarten through grade 12 mandated program.

Christine Magill said that when speaking to the parents regarding bullying their thoughts range from, kids will be kids to zero tolerance is expected.

Assistant Principal Magill explained that when bullying from the outside trickles into the school, the school has to deal with it but the children don't always want to "snitch".

A concern the **assistant principal** brought to the commission's attention was that, when a child is suspended because zero tolerance is the school's policy, there is the possibility of further social networking access when the child is home.

Another concern is that mandates need to come with funding, the schools can't afford it.

Christine Magill ended by stating that she would love to see a bullying blog for sharing the work that has been done already. She then introduces the Birchwood middle school art teacher, **Kim Celona**.

Ms. Celona explains that the Birchwood students have put together a collaboration of written poems, 4 plays, set costumes and music. This program has been positively received and has brought emotional growth and maturity. The children have been empowered. The parents have been positive and should be a part of this.

Ms. Celona then introduced two students of Birchwood Middle School, **Jacob Kaufman** and **Brian O'Gara**.

Jacob Kaufman explains how this program has raised community awareness and how the students have formed bonds.

Jacob shared his frustration how they sent out 44 press releases about their presentations and no one has come to cover them.

Jacob then introduces his friend **Brian O'Gara**

Senator Tassoni interrupts to bring **Jacob** back up to speak to him. **Chairman Tassoni** congratulates **Jacob** and the work that he is doing. He tells **Jacob** that he will give him his e-mail address and take care of his press release in **Senator Tassoni's** paper.

Brian O'Gara speaks about the severity of bullying and suicide.

Jacob suggests a children's bullying summit. He then sets up the e projector for their power point.

Power Point – Carl Joseph Walker- Hoover was constantly teased about being gay, they now have a National Day of Tolerance to commemorate Carl's life.

The power point was a bringing to light, all the children that have been lost to bully-cide over the past year.

Senator Tassoni invites **Brian** and **Jacob** to come to the State House.

Representative Ruggiero and **Catherine Pleau** (Commission member), congratulate the young men and flatter them.

Senator Lanzi tells the boys that their parents should be proud.

Dr. Filippelli asks **Jacob** and **Brian**, what is one thing that you would like to see happen?

Jacob and **Brian** both would like to see one state wide bullying policy created through legislation.

Dr. Fillipelli addresses the young men again; asking what punishment they think would work. **Brian** responds that police involvement is what he wants, so that children feel safe. **Jacob** interjects stating that being suspended doesn't work.

Renee Palazzo (sitting in for Superintendent O'Brien), asks the young men, do you think students are afraid to tell?

Jacob felt that if there is student support you won't feel like a "snitch".

Brian agrees with **Jacob's** statement and thinks by telling, you will help stop future suicides.

Commission member Gina Picard asks, do you think bullying is different with boys and girls? The boys respond that it may be a different tactic, but the goal is the same, belittle and feel better about themselves.

Dr. Filippelli asks the boys, do you recognize the difference between teasing and bullying?

Jacob says yes, bullying is malicious.

Brian says they also want you to hurt.

Chairman Tassoni introduces **Kate Reilly**.

Kate Reilly, Sojourner House Program Director

Kate explains her "Passport 2 Social Media hand-out", how to be safe in the digital age (testimony available).

Kate explained how monitoring your children in the digital world is the same concept as monitoring your children in the real world. How The Passport explains what is ok to share and not ok to share and that parents must be involved.

Representative Ruggiero to **Kate Reilly**; Do you have special funding and have you contacted RIDE or Commissioner Deborah Gist about Passport 2 Social Media, and having this be a part of their curriculum?

Kate Reilly; yes, I have spoken to them and want to follow through with it.

Chairman Tassoni opened the floor for **Public Testimony**

Several members of the public testified before the Commission with various comments, stories and suggestions. The suggestions were as follows:

- A parent would not like to attach a criminal aspect to punishment.
- The same parent does not want our freedom of speech taken away with legislation.
- A resident believes that bullying mandates across the state are needed, not criminal action if there is no threat of bodily harm.

Senator Tassoni explained that there will be a state wide mandate put into legislation this time. The senator also told everyone that *Stop Bullying RI. Com* is being worked on right now in the State House.

Chairman Tassoni addressed **Jacob** and **Brian** and asked them to think of a public service announcement that we can use on the internet and public access TV. That he would like to work together with them on this.

Chairman Tassoni thanked everyone for their attendance and announced that the next hearing would be held on January 13th, 2011.

He asked if there were any last comments; with no comments the chairman then adjourned.



SENATE POLICY OFFICE MEMORANDUM

*State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Senate Policy Office, Room SB27
State House, Providence, RI 02903*

TO: The Honorable John J. Tassoni, Jr.

FROM: Anne Marie DeMello, Senate Policy Analyst

DATE: February 10, 2011

SUBJECT: **Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying and Sexting, December 2, 2010**

The following is a synopsis of the Senate Commission, which was held on Thursday, February 10, 2011 at the North Smithfield Middle School in North Smithfield, RI.

Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Senator John T. Tassoni, Jr. called the meeting to order at 6:20p.m. and made a few announcements about the Walk the Walk walkathon to be held in May and the public service announcement was viewed. The chairman welcomed everyone and introduced as the first speaker, **Mr. Stephen F. Lindberg**, North Smithfield's Superintendent of schools.

Mr. Lindberg shared his frustration with bullying and the effect it has on the school day. He explained how the school and the school system are not able to handle and check cyber bullying due to lack of technology and man power. Bullying and cyber bullying issues can take up to 4+ hours in the day for the administrator to handle.

Mr. Lindberg felt that schools should not be responsible or accountable for matters that take place outside of the school it's neither logical nor legal.

Senator Tassoni asked the Superintendent, what would you like to see happen, what "tools" are you looking for?

Mr. Lindberg answered, I don't know what level of sophisticated technology is needed for investigating these matters, but I do know it's not happening quickly enough. What consequences would I like to see? Can we fine the parents? There needs to be accountability.

Senator Tassoni questions Mr. Lindberg on whether or not he supports in house suspension.

Mr. Sanchioni explains that M.A. law requires a comprehensive anti-bullying plan including;

- Professional training
- K- 12 curriculum
- Notification to police if something happens

Superintendent Sanchioni has been involved in anti- bullying curriculum for 20 years the curriculum is called “Courageous Peer Leadership”. This curriculum empowers the students to stop bullying. A student’s voice is more powerful than adults and together they are even more successful.

Mr. Sanchioni introduces a colleague who also works with him in spreading the message of “Courageous Peer Leadership”, **Mr. Andy Zitoli**, Millis M.A. Middle school Superintendent.

Andy Zitoli stressed how their students are trained to combat bullying by;

- Aiding the victim
- Stopping the bully
- Telling an adult

Mr. Zitoli shared a personal story about his daughter and a cyber bullying incident at the Millis Middle School. The result of this situation indicated to Mr. Zitoli that their teachings about bullying are working.

He notes that his kids have been trained to:

- protect fragile students
- never let a child sit alone
- display courageous leadership

Mr. Zitoli said this is expected and he gets it.

Senator Tassoni asked if Mr. Zitoli has a contract.

Mr. Zitoli responds that they have expectations and this is signed in the students hand book.

Mr. Sanchioni adds that the children want to be a part of a group that solves problems- it’s intrinsic in middle school children.

Mr. Zitoli describes the training program as a lot of role play, teaching empathy, and what can be done in the role play situation when bullying has been observed.

A commitment of excellence is expected and posted all over the school.

The children leave the middle school leaders and remain such.

Chairman Tassoni introduces Ann Burke

Ann Burke is the President of the Lindsay Ann Burke memorial Fund, supporting the prevention of relationship violence through education.



SENATE POLICY OFFICE MEMORANDUM

*State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Senate Policy Office, Room SB27
State House, Providence, RI 02903*

TO: The Honorable John J. Tassoni, Jr.

FROM: Anne Marie DeMello, Senate Policy Analyst

DATE: February 17, 2011

SUBJECT: **Special Senate Commission to Study and Make Recommendations Related to the Problem of Cyberthreats, Cyberbullying and Sexting, December 2, 2010**

The following is a synopsis of the Senate Commission, which was held on Thursday, February 17, 2011 at LaSalle Academy Providence, RI.

Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Senator John T. Tassoni, Jr. called the meeting to order at 6:15p.m. and made a few announcements; what members were unable to attend- Superintendent Robert O'Brien, Lt. Nicholas Tella, Dr. Jacqueline Striano, Dr. Lawrence Filippelli, and Mrs. Gina Picard. The plans for after tonight; adopt legislation and have a press conference which all are invited to.

Senator Tassoni made it clear that legislation will not be a hindrance to the community.

Senator Tassoni introduced **Kevin Robinson-** BMX World Champion and Motivational Speaker.

Kevin Robinson welcomes R.I. and shares some personal information about him and how he now travels all over to help stop bullying. **Mr. Robinson** expressed his concern about bullying and the harmful effects happening in alarming numbers. He stated that cyber bullying allows the bully to hide behind a screen. **Kevin Robinson** believes the key is to teach kids what to do to prevent bullying not just what to do after.

Senator Tassoni thanks Mr. Robinson for contacting us and for coming today to speak.

Chairman Tassoni opens the floor for Public Testimony

Christine Dufault, a parent of a child bullied since the age of eight (8) spoke very emotionally about the school's policies in reference to no punishments for emotional abuse. She felt that unless her son was physically harmed there were no repercussions for the bully's emotional taunting. Christine wants the schools to know that *words* are just as bad.

Ms. Dufault said she doesn't want punishments, she wants changes. Her son Christopher gets up to speak and explains that words hurt and something needs to be done.

Senator Tassoni thanks Christopher and calls him a big man and a hero for speaking. The chairman then asks Christopher what would you like to see happen?

Christopher believes that suspension is not a punishment and that we need to address the verbal assaults.

Senator Lanzi states that school is a hostile environment and in writing legislation we need to look at them as such. Such an environment disallows productivity; this wouldn't be allowed in a working environment. This is against our civil rights.

Commission member **Christine Caron** addresses Christopher asking would he be comfortable to speak on his behalf if the culture of the school was different. Christopher answers yes.

Senator Tassoni introduces Veronica Baron, a Lincoln school senior who started a K-12 program at school called the "The REAL Team", Real being an acronym for *Respect, Empathize, Accept and Listen*. Testimony available.

Senator Tassoni thanks Veronica and tells her that she hit every note in her speech and that hopefully many will see this on TV, you're a leader.

Jessie Lewis then testifies sharing his story about being bullied as an openly gay man. He states that 84.6% of gay and lesbian students have been emotionally harassed. That there are GLBT (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender) programs available to change the climate in schools.

Senator Tassoni tells Jessie that the members will address gay and lesbians in the legislation. Bullying does not discriminate.

Representative Ruggiero said enumeration of classes is what we will address in legislation.

Jennifer Anzevino- ACLU had testimony available addressing the ACLU's stand on cyber bullying. Christian Aguiar concerned R.I. resident shares his feelings and a personal experience.

Kevin Robinson added that there are anti-bullying clubs being started in different schools because groups are stronger than individuals.

Senator Tassoni shares observations after being at a school with young children and alarming it was to learn that many 3rd graders had cell phones, went on face book and also had there own face book accounts.

Chairman Tassoni thanks parents, teachers, representatives of organizations, students and concerned residents for all their support.

The members all expressed their appreciation for the support and courage of many that have come to the hearings and both grateful and honored for being a part of this important commission.

7:45 p.m. Senator Tassoni announces that the hearing is adjourned.