

## **Rhode Island Dignity At Work Act HB 6352**

My name is John Cznadel, a resident of the State of Virginia. I have been a public school teacher from 1974 to 2010 in Wisconsin (5 years) and Virginia (31 years). I was a bully target on two occasions during those years, and in my retirement I worked with my State Delegate, Reverend Luke Torian, to pass two House Bills, HB 1044 and HB 2176 that designated workplace bullying as illegal.

The Dignity at Work Act, as presented to the Rhode Island House of Delegates, is intended to present a framework to be followed by employers that will protect workers from unwanted, abusive conduct by their employers. This legislation intends to define the types of tactics that workplace bullies use to frustrate, embarrass, intimidate, and sabotage otherwise productive workers as they do their work. This legislation also provides recommendations for holding the employers responsible for allowing a toxic workplace environment to exist.

In my 36 years as a public school band director, I have been the victim of workplace bullying two times. I tolerated both bullies for two years each, with ten successful years between them. As I read this legislative bill, I can say that I experienced nearly all of the tactics bullies use against workers. I spent 25 years in the care of a psychologist who provided comfort during those stressful times. Also, he helped me understand how I could navigate my work life and my home life during and after my bully encounters. Without his help, I would not be alive today.

My first bully spent two years at our school as assistant principal. We interacted only once for a student discipline issue that she handled responsibly. Once she became principal her attitude toward me changed drastically. I began to receive letters of reprimand from her, all ending with a warning of being fired. She also found cause to have me suspended for a day without pay. In the two years that she was our principal, her attitude toward me was very sour. In private meetings she refused to look at me as we spoke, and she spoke with a negative sound to her voice. Although she told her superiors that she was doing everything she could to work effectively with me, she would actually ignore me, even turning her back on me and walking away when I would attempt to start casual conversations

My bully principal's intentions were a mystery for a long time, but on April 9, 1997 during a meeting in which she met with me privately to inform me

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that she was going to eliminate a major part of my band program, her frustration caused her to blurt out “You refuse to work with me because I’m a woman!” It then became clear that it was my gender that offended her.

My second bully came to us in 2008. Her intention was to replace me, as a high visibility staff member, with someone she liked better. She lacked common sense and made many poor decisions that caused her dismissal after five years. However, from the start her harassment of me caused me to suffer a breakdown that ended my career. Meanwhile, her replacement for me failed to earn any Superior ratings at ten annual state assessments. I had earned many Superiors in my 29 years at my school.

What I want to leave the committee with is this: Harassment of employees can take on many appearances. I want you to know that a target can be totally innocent, having done nothing to offend a supervisor. And, when a bully target is describing to a friend or colleague what they experienced at the hand of a bully, it is important to point out that the listener may very well have a thought in the back of their minds that the target probably did something to bother the supervisor. They will assume the target argued with the supervisor, or made a mistake that the supervisor has refused to forgive. These affronts may not have happened at all, especially when you consider that the supervisor will be allowed to issue reprimands that no higher superior will bother to peruse. You will find many bullies who are given leeway in disciplinary matters.

Although I am a resident of Virginia, it has been difficult for me to determine if any teaching staff member has benefitted from the Healthy School Workplaces legislation. I have been told that confidentiality protocols require privacy. It is my hope that the Rhode Island Dignity At Work Act will provide the kind of protection that all workers are entitled to.

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