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Testimony Supporting House Bill 6352: The Dignity at Work Act

My name is Laura Dzurec and I am licensed as a Registered Nurse. I have studied workplace bullying and its ramifications for the past decade. I speak today in support of passage of DAWA legislation, because workplace interactions should not mimic schoolyard brawls from some parallel dimension. Often, though, they do.

You might be asking, How can this be? I hope my testimony will make that clear. Let me begin with a bullying story:

The nurse reported the physician's action, after he threw a clipboard at her. "What did you do to make the physician that angry?" asked the Director of Nursing, in response to the nurse's report: **"I'm going to have to write you up."**

Wait a minute. "I'm going to have to write **you** up?" The nurse?? Who was it that threw the clipboard? How did the clipboard tossing assailant escape reprisal? That is the question to ask yourself, because the HOW is the story of the power driving workplace bullying.

Despite the inherent absurdity and inappropriateness of their actions, bullies typically are accepted and legitimated in the workplace because their actions are consistent with long-established workplace expectations. Bullies never break the rules that define workplace propriety; they just bend the rules a bit. And they do it by telling self-aggrandizing stories. Like Scheherazade across 1001 Arabian nights, bullies get their power by sharing subtle anecdotes day after day in the workplace. Through those stories, they stretch expected reality, imposing self-serving and confusing 'evidence' of their right to power. Their communications comprise juicy, engaging narratives, and there's nothing listeners like better than juicy, engaging narratives—this is a simple neurophysiological fact. Their sticky stories put listeners at significant risk of long-term physical and emotional sequelae, of potential suicide and homicide. All through the power of made-up stories.

In the nurse's story, it's easy to see the discrimination, injustice, humiliation and far-reaching ramifications of bullies' actions. It's also easy to see, but hard to understand, how the bully, himself, got off the hook. That's why DAWA is important legislation. That legislation will give people like the nurse in our story a place to stand, providing guidelines that can effectively stop bullies' subtle, storied efforts to strip dignity from places of work, to empower themselves at a significant cost to others and to their places of work.

As regards the story of the nurse, you might be saying, 'She should have sucked it up.' You might add, 'Can't happen; not to me—I'm smarter than that.' But it's likely that you, yourself, have been impacted by a workplace bully. Bullying is ubiquitous. And so what?

Like a drunken driver, workplace bullies typically have the right of way (Coen, 2009), granted them through sticky storytelling. Left unattended, bullies' stories will come to control workplace climate and the direction of operations, enwrapping everyone—from top administration to those assigned to offices in the basement—in their webs of deception. Bullies' narrative skill, their exquisite awareness of what others value, their potent self-interest, and the very physiology that drives narrative understanding unite to foster bullies' undeniable power in the workplace. Truly, bullies' power is power by design, power that is addictive and addicting as it manipulates through well-told story.

Please consider supporting this bill. It's time to put an end to the paradoxical impact of bullies' sticky workplace stories.