



Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services**

**RE: Pro Int. No 376-A establishing an anti-bullying hotline and
an anti-bullying mobile device application**

April 26, 2018

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Good morning. My name is Gena Miller. I am a staff attorney and Greenberg Traurig Equal Justice Works Fellow in the School Justice Project at Advocates for Children of New York (“AFC”). At AFC, I support families of students who are involved in bullying incidents in school through direct representation; trainings to students, parents, and professionals about students’ rights to a safe, supportive school environment; and policy advocacy. My work has a special focus on Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer or Questioning (“LGBTQ”) students and students with disabilities. I testify today to share insights and make recommendations based on AFC’s extensive experience working with students involved in incidents of bullying and harassment that have impacted their education.

We appreciate the City Council’s attention to this significant issue. However, we are concerned that Pro Int. No 376-A, requiring the Commissioner of the Department of Youth and Community Development to establish an anti-bullying hotline and an anti-bullying mobile device application, would duplicate the efforts of the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) and unintentionally make it harder for families to report complaints of school-related bullying. The DOE recently



created an online form on its website to receive and respond to bullying complaints as an alternative to contacting school staff or emailing or calling the DOE's Office of Safety and Youth Development. The DOE also recently announced that it plans to create an online bullying complaint portal in 2019. Since most bullying is school-related, a hotline or mobile device application would likely be duplicative of the DOE's complaint system, confuse families, and create an unnecessary extra layer of bureaucracy since school-related complaints would still need to be referred to the DOE to get addressed.

Additionally, the bill does not include necessary training for staff who would provide the information, resources, and counseling specified in the bill. If one of the purposes of the proposed hotline is to provide real-time support to young people and their families who may be in or near crisis by providing counseling and referrals to appropriate resources and services, then hotline staff must be properly trained.

To prevent and address bullying, the City should invest in building positive, inclusive school climates by meaningfully implementing timely, effective anti-bullying training to staff and students and funding whole-school evidence-based approaches, including Collaborative Problem Solving.

Towards that end, first, we recommend that the City Council urge the City and the DOE to improve the quality and delivery of anti-bullying trainings to all school staff. State law and DOE Chancellor's Regulation A-832 require each school to designate at least one staff member to serve as an anti-bullying resource for students



and staff. The staff member, called a Respect for All (“RFA”) Liaison, is required to receive training in how to prevent, identify, report, and stop bullying behavior, and then turnkey the training to all students and staff by October 31 each school year. AFC’s experience indicates that a number of schools do not provide this turnkey training to staff and students, and when they do, the training does not give the support that staff need to prevent and address bullying. For example, it has been our experience that some school staff fail to report bullying because they struggle to differentiate bullying from other behavior, and that many school administrators are not adequately trained to investigate and address bullying. Additionally, some RFA Liaisons have reported to AFC that they do not feel confident enough in their own training to train their colleagues in bullying prevention, identification, reporting, and investigation procedures; effective ways to stop bullying; and supports and interventions for students who were bullied or engaged in bullying. To ensure the provision and quality of anti-bullying training, the DOE should review the delivery of RFA Liaison training, provide more support to RFA Liaisons (including compensation or relief from other obligations), and better monitor the completion and efficacy of RFA trainings for staff and students.

Second, we call on the City Council to work with the Mayor to negotiate a final budget that invests at least \$1 million per year in whole-school trainings in Collaborative Problem Solving. Research shows that, when implemented with fidelity, this evidence-based approach promotes a positive school climate and



supportive, inclusive learning environments where bullying is prevented and appropriately addressed. Collaborative Problem Solving develops the skills and capacities of students and staff to develop healthy relationships, constructively resolve conflict, and de-escalate behavior. The Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline recommended that the City and the DOE implement this approach in reports released in 2015 and 2016. While we appreciate the DOE's plans for expansion of *whole-district* Restorative Practices to three additional districts, the City and the DOE have yet to invest in a long-term strategic plan with funding to build capacity to develop and expand *whole-school* evidence-based approaches that train all members of the school staff to promote a positive, inclusive school climate. The City should start by investing \$1 million for whole-school training in Collaborative Problem Solving in the final Fiscal Year 2019 budget.

Thank you for your opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.