

Testimony of Cortnie Killen

In Support of HB 2578

House Committee on Education

February 8, 2018

I have worked in the mental health field with children for the past 5 years in the school, community, and home settings. During these 5 years I worked as a community case manager, targeted case manager, the crisis case manager for all of Butler County for 2 years. While in this position I worked closely with elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools in providing immediate support with children who are facing severe mental health crisis'. We define a crisis as someone who is at threat to hurting themselves or others.

One word. One look. One action. Just one act of bullying is all it takes to trigger someone into a mental health crisis. A head bashing into a wall, a razor cutting into skin, a rope around a neck, a gun towards one's head, a hand full of pills, a loaded gun in a backpack. These are the results that people feel are the only escape away from being bullied. Children that face bullying often become diagnosed with depression, anxiety, anger, oppositional defiant disorder, PTSD, and other psychological disorders.

In April 2017, I was assigned a case of a 13 year old 7th grade female at Circle Middle School that has been diagnosed with severe depression. Symptoms presented were low self esteem, negative self talk, self harming behaviors, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts. The problem at hand was consistent bullying from multiple girls in school and online. It got to the point where she would refuse to attend school and when she was there she would have multiple

anxiety and panic attacks. When she was not in school, bullying would happen online. School officials were not supportive and did not take steps to end the problem. The girls that were bullying continued to do so because there were no consequences for their actions. She would go home where the only support she had was the thoughts in her head. She started to self harm by cutting her wrists and thighs to escape from the pain in her head. She attempted to kill herself on different occasions by taking an extreme amount of pills. One night she could not calm down and she got to the point where she went into the kitchen and held a knife up to her throat because she felt like that was the only way that the bullying would stop. She told me the following day, "if I am not here then they cannot bully me!" What stopped her from killing herself that night was her younger brother got up and went to the bathroom so she put the knife away and went back to bed. Instead of the school taking action they allowed her to miss school because she was afraid of going to school. School administrators found it easier to remove the situation instead of taking care and figuring out what can make her feel safe in school. The school allowed for her to take the remainder of the year off and froze her grades. The only thing that the school was willing to do was to bring her and the girls that have bullied her in for a meeting. The day that this meeting was to happen she woke up and attempted to get ready, but for a kid that is severely depressed and anxious this caused for her to have a full on anxiety attack that morning. She started to panic and could not get ready and face the bullies. The school did not offer any other kind of meeting after that.

Why should a 13 year old and the family have to go through all of this without the support or action from the school? Why should the school be able to just brush this under the rug without anything being changed? This is just one example of my 5 years working in the mental health field that a child has been severely affected from a group of classmates bullying.

Enforcing schools to take more action into bully prevention and make it more public would increase kids ability to focus on what they need to be focusing on at school. Not having obsessive fear about walking in the hallways, going to the bathroom, eating lunch, or riding on the bus. Setting a clear expectation for the kids, parents, and faculty would create a more positive atmosphere for all to learn in. Clearly posting these guidelines will help remind all what type of atmosphere we are creating across the state in our schools.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I am available to stand for questions.



