



SUPPORT for SB 242 (HB 224)

Senate Bill (SB) 242 by Sen. Wendy Davis, companion by Mark Strama, is a bill to address the epidemic and tragic consequences of bullying and cyberbullying as they affect the lives of children in Texas' public education system.

SUPPORT SB 242 TO ENSURE THAT FEWER YOUNG TEXANS WILL DIE AS A RESULT OF BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING.

Hunter Layland—September 30, 2009, Cleburne, Texas

Hunter was repeatedly bullied and verbally teased by classmates at Cleburne High School. Hunter was harassed about facial scars and a hearing impairment he developed as a result of a car accident as a toddler. Classmates stated the school's awareness regarding Hunter's harassment by other students, and on several occasions [they] witnessed his attempts to extend friendships to the bullies. It was reported that on the day of Hunter's suicide, he was told by another student, "If I had a face like yours, I'd shoot myself." Hunter shot himself in the head later that day.

Since Hunter's death, there have been at least three more confirmed suicides and one attempted suicide related to bullying and cyberbullying in Texas.

—Texas School Safety Center

SB 242 expands the definition of bullying to include cyberbullying. Cyberbullying occurs when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, or mobile phones. Because of the technological component, a cyberbully has the ability to strike repeatedly from almost any location and at any time, often with relative anonymity. SB 242 seeks to expand current law to include cyberbullying under the umbrella of traditional bullying and gives educators and school districts additional tools to combat this pernicious and pervasive form of social and emotional attack.

SB 242 is the most comprehensive bullying and cyberbullying legislation that has been filed this session. In addition to expanding the current definition of bullying to include cyberbullying, SB 242 gives districts the ability to protect victims of off-campus bullying attacks when the attacks affect the campus educational environment. The bill also gives districts the flexibility to move the bully, not just the victim, to another classroom or campus after an appropriate investigation. It also requires both the parents of the victim and the bully to be notified in most cases of bullying incidents. Perhaps most importantly, SB 242 encourages the prevention of future bullying and cyberbullying through an examination of district policy and the encouragement of educator training on bullying and bullying prevention in the hope of creating greater awareness of the issue at the district and campus levels.

Bully Police USA, a national organization that advocates for bullied children, currently gives Texas' current bullying statute a C-. If the changes in SB 242 become law, Texas would receive an A rating, if not an A+.

SB 242 protects ALL Texas public schoolchildren from bullying. Victims of bullying and cyberbullying are not limited to any one group. They are male and female, cross all social strata and are targeted by their attackers for a nearly infinite number of reasons. SB 242 gives educators and school districts better tools to protect them all.

Here are a few sobering statistics to consider. According to a recent study conducted by MTV and the Associated Press, 56 percent of those who have been bullied report that they were "very" or "extremely" upset after the most recent time they were targeted. Additionally, young people who have been bullied have been found to be twice as likely as their peers to have received treatment from a mental health professional and nearly three times as likely to have considered dropping out of school. Most alarmingly, the same study found that middle school victims of cyberbullying are nearly three times more likely to have considered ending their own life (8 percent of cyberbullying victims compared with 3 percent of those who have not been victims).

**On behalf of our more than 116,000 members, ATPE respectfully urges you to vote
FOR SB 242.**