



RANDOLPH

BRAINTREE

BROOKFIELD

RANDOLPH UNION HIGH SCHOOL

15 Forest Street
Randolph, Vermont 05060
802-728-3397

Date: 05.03.2023

To: Vermont House Education Committee

From: Lisa Manning Floyd; Co-Principal Randolph Union Middle High School

Re: Proposed Amendment to Bill S.103

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to testify about this important topic. I am Lisa Manning Floyd, Co-Principal at Randolph Union Middle High School.

As Caty shared, this is a topic that is vital to the culture and sense of community in our schools. We work with staff to create a safe and healthy learning environment for all students. Unfortunately, once we have wrapped up the process that Caty described, we can receive significant pushback from students and families. At times, this has been led by national organizations. We regularly are navigating the tension between our existing laws and student's freedom of speech rights.

The laws as written provide us what we need to create safe environments; we act on the complaints that we receive, follow up, and lead thorough investigations when warranted, and it is often warranted. These actions are required; and followed with fidelity. They are also timebound. Additionally, our school's policies and code of conduct support us in holding students accountable for behavior that may not meet the threshold of harassment, but erodes a school's climate nonetheless. We as school districts are permitted to strengthen what is already legally defined, but we may not nor would we want to dilute the standards to which we are held. The work of helping students know where the boundaries and limits are is tireless. We live in a world where media influences show students behavior that is not acceptable in schools and workplaces every day. People may say that it takes a village to raise children, but in our communities, the schools are often the only places that identify what is harmful and harassing behavior and act on it. Our threshold is not the same as it is in workplaces, the bar for what we hold people accountable for is not whether or not behavior is severe or pervasive, instead, we need only to show that it is impacting a student's access to education. We prove this when we examine patterns of the impacted student's behavior, their performance in classes, attendance records, and the like. We have created systems in our schools, with the personnel that we have to navigate the laws as they exist with fidelity and the gravity with which they deserve.

We, as public school leaders, work with students with a wide range of needs and behaviors, disabilities and mental health challenges. Our mission is to educate all of our students, and that is something that we take very seriously. One aspect of our

school's mission includes preparing students for the next phase of their lives, whether that includes post secondary education or jumping into the workforce. We work to ensure that our students know how to maintain respectful, healthy relationships. And, we MUST meet our students where they are at. There are protections for students who behave based on varied abilities or mental health needs, we must work to help them from harming others, while at the same time educating them and restoring the sense of community. Relying on mental health supports, special education supports, strong relationships and boundaries as well as restorative practices helps us to educate whole children and prepare them for the world beyond our doors.

Lowering the threshold for what is considered harassment will not make children kinder, and will not make adults who do not see the wisdom in following these laws with fidelity more diligent. It WILL place an undue burden on those already following the law. This is already a time consuming task; that is incredibly worthwhile. Although we have conducted many Hazing, Harassment, and Bullying investigations this year, the benefits to doing this work are many. We are continually educating students and staff, we are in regular communication with families who often begin the process in a defensive stance, and end the process understanding the law and our expectations more thoroughly. As educators, this is our work.

The children we work with daily are a part of all of our communities, and the support, empathy, and knowledge we empower them with today impacts us all. We hope that you consider leaving these laws as written and instead focusing on changing them and focus on lending support for adequate training and support for schools as they take on this challenging work.

Thank you, sincerely,

Lisa Manning Floyd
Co-Principal

