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TO: Vermont House Committee on Education
FROM: Cary Brown, Executive Director, Commission on Women
RE: H931, an act relating to miscellaneous changes in education law

May 13, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed changes to the composition of the Advisory Council on Hazing, Harassment, and Bullying Prevention in Schools that are included in the Senate version of H931.

The Commission on Women has been part of ongoing conversations over the past several years about the need for expanding and broadening the representation on this council. We were very pleased to see these changes added to the miscellaneous education bill.

Through information we collect from intake calls to our office, our outreach activities, and collaborations with youth-focused organizations, we know that sexual harassment and bullying are all too common in schools. We have heard from students that there are inadequate measures in place to protect them, and that it is one of the top issues they would like to see addressed.

The Advisory Council on Hazing, Harassment, and Bullying Prevention in Schools is an excellent place to work on fixing this, and expanding it to include voices who represent those who are most impacted is smart. The proposed changes do just this, and would strengthen the work the council can do.

There is no one voice that can speak for the challenges faced in schools by students who are bullied or harassed, just as there is no one voice that can speak for all of the equity concerns across state government, which is exactly why the State of Vermont has made significant investments in building its own equity resources for state government – including the Commission on Women, the Human Rights Commission, and the Office of Racial Equity, all of whom bring specialized expertise and resources that are designed to support state government in its work.

Including all these state offices (not only the HRC, which has been included since the beginning) on the Council is a smart and efficient way to use the state resources that we have available. All of these offices bring research, resources, and practical contributions to the work of other state agencies, and we each have our own areas of focus in order to do that well.

These SOV offices are not advocacy organizations, and should not be characterized as such.

We do agree, however, that there is a place for organizations that may be characterized this way, when they bring specific perspectives and expertise for impacted students. The inclusion of members representing the VT Coalition for Disability Rights, the VT Students Anti-Discrimination Network, Outright Vermont, The VT Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, and the VT Family Network will help ensure that the Council's work is as effective as it can be.

Thank you again for considering these changes.