



Renee Spence, Executive Director
9 Trotters Ridge Court, Catonsville, MD. 21228
410-925-2183
pssamed@gmail.com

BILL: House Bill 669
TITLE: Public Schools- Boards of Education – Anonymous Two-Way Text Messaging Tip Program
DATE: February 21, 2017
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: Renee McGuirk Spence, Executive Director, PSSAM
Email: pssamed@gmail.com; Cell: 410-925-2183

House Bill 669 requires each local board of education to establish an anonymous two-way text messaging tip program to allow the reporting of an act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation of a student; requiring each board to publicize the two-way text messaging tip program in specified locations; requires the completion of a victim of bullying, harassment, or intimidation report form and the provision of a specified transcript to a specified person on receipt of a report of any act of bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

PSSAM appreciates the intent of House Bill 669 and the sponsors' concern for the safety and well-being of our students. We recognize the devastating consequences that can occur when there is student bullying, harassment, or intimidation. We are committed to the reduction and elimination of this egregious behavior. However, we respectfully **oppose** this bill. Prevention of bullying continues to be a top priority for all local school systems. It is important to note that much has been accomplished in the past several years on this very important issue.

To address and prevent bullying, the State Board of Education adopted the Safe Schools Reporting Act, which requires a uniform reporting form to be available in public schools to victims of bullying and requires annual reports from MSDE on the incidence of harassment and intimidation. The Safe Schools Reporting Act provides detailed disaggregated data that is used by the State and local school systems to analyze bullying incidents and related actions.

All school systems have implemented system-wide and school-wide programs about bullying awareness and prevention. Twenty-three out of twenty-four LEAs have their Bullying and Harassment form digitized, thus making it easier to report incidents. Students, parents, and staff in the school systems report feeling more comfortable reporting bullying and harassment using the digitized reports.

The 2014 Safe School Report marks the fourth year during which bullying prevention programming was required to be presented by local school systems to students, staff, and volunteers. It is speculated that the required programming heightened awareness of the issue among the school communities. In fact, the National Parent-Teacher Association reports that the most effective bullying prevention strategies involve the entire school community.

PSSAM believes that the decision to purchase an anonymous two-way text messaging program as required by House Bill 669 should not be legislatively mandated, but should be a local school system decision. As an example, Queen Anne's County Public Schools began an anonymous two-way text messaging tip program in

2013 known as “Text2StopIt!” and operated by Text2Them, Inc. The “Text2StopIt” program was started in the Queen Anne’s County school system in middle and high schools as a way for students and parents to relay information to school administrators about issues with bullying or other issues with school safety. It encourages students and parents to anonymously text to report any bullying or other unsafe activity in their schools. After the information is compiled (including pictures or a video of the incident if available), a complete text conversation is sent to the designated school administrator for follow-up action.

Finally, PSSAM strongly opposes all unfunded mandates. As demonstrated by the Queen Anne’s County Public Schools example noted above, anonymous two-way texting programs can be effective. However, the purchase of such a technology program should be a local school system decision, with input from the school communities.

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM respectfully **OPPOSES** House Bill 669 and urges an **unfavorable** committee report.