



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruth Hassell-Thompson

## Providing All Students With A Safe Learning Environment

RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON June 24, 2010

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### *Senate Passes Landmark 'Dignity For All Students Act'*

(Albany, NY) Committed to ensuring that all students have a safe environment in which to learn, free from harassment and discrimination, the Senate Democratic Majority passed the 'Dignity for All Students Act' (S1987B/ Duane). This legislation aims to provide all students with a safe school environment conducive to learning by putting an end to harassment and discrimination based on but not limited to race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or sex.

"No child should be terrified to go to school simply because of who they are. There is no place for bullying and discrimination in New York's classrooms," said Senator Thomas Duane (D-Manhattan), lead sponsor of the bill. "Punishing students after the fact does little to address the root cause of the problem. *Dignity* is unique in that it seeks to prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination through education and awareness before it occurs."

In order to address these issues and establish a safer, more constructive school environment, this bill:

- Prohibits harassment or discrimination against students by employees or students while on school property or on school grounds.

- Defines “harassment” as the creation of a hostile environment by conduct, verbal threats, intimidation or abuse that has or would unreasonably interfere with educational performance, opportunities, benefits, or physical or emotional well being, or cause fear for physical safety.

- Prohibits discrimination based on an individual’s actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex.

Senate Majority Conference Leader John L. Sampson said, “Every child is entitled to attend school in an environment free of harassment and discrimination. We know a safe and supportive school environment is vital for students to achieve their full potential, however, far too many students do not have such an environment. I applaud Senator Duane for addressing this very serious problem and standing up against discrimination and bullying for our young people.”

Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Mt.Vernon) said, “No child should be subjected to abuse and harassment, whether based on their race, weight, religion, disability or sexual orientation. I applaud the passing of this legislation, and Senator Duane’s efforts to give all students equal access to a learning environment that fosters educational and emotional growth and is free from fear.”

The continuing need for this legislation is apparent from recent data demonstrating the prevalence of bias-based harassment in New York schools. A survey commissioned by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that more than one-third (39%) of New York students reported that bullying, name calling, and harassment is a serious problem in school. Students were asked about the frequency of witnessing other students bullied, called names, or harassed in school.

Similar measures have already been passed in 11 other states: California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin, and in dozens of New York localities including Albany, Buffalo, East Hampton, Heuvelton, New York City, Rochester, Saratoga Springs and Yonkers.