



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Tedisco

## Tedisco, Jackson, Sepulveda & Walsh Call for Passage of Bi-Partisan “Jacobe’s Law” to Ensure Schools Notify Parents When Their Children Are Bullied

JAMES TEDISCO May 24, 2023

| ISSUE: **SCHOOL BULLYING, TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**



**Albany--**Senator Jim Tedisco (R,C-44<sup>th</sup> Senate District), Senator Robert Jackson (D-Manhattan), Senator Luis Sepulveda (D-Bronx) and Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh (R,C-Ballston) today joined with Christine and Richard Taras, the parents of 13-year-old Jacobe Taras of Moreau, who tragically took his own life as a result of bullying, and Isabella Sementilli of Niskayuna, who received a traumatic brain injury as a result of school bullying,

to call for passage of bi-partisan legislation, “Jacobe’s Law,” to require that schools notify parents when a child is being threatened by a bully.

“Jacobe’s Law” ([S.44/A.2231](#)), which is sponsored by Republicans and Democrats, requires that school employees charged with receiving reports of harassment, bullying or discrimination contact the parents or guardians of the students involved – both the bullies and victims -- when an incident of bullying or harassment occurs. “Jacobe’s Law” has passed the Senate in prior sessions.

In 2012, the Dignity for All Students Act became state law as a means to address bullying in our schools. Although schools are required to report incidents to the state Education Department, the Dignity for All Students Act does not require schools to alert parents when their child has been bullied or is believed to be the perpetrator of bullying. Rather, the law currently leaves it up to each school district to decide whether they will or will not notify parents of children involved in an incident of bullying. This serious gap in state law has led to fatal consequences.

Bullying is defined based on what’s listed under the [Dignity for All Students Act](#) and what incidences schools are currently required to report to the New York State Education Department.

Jacobe’s parents say they were not notified by his school of the extent of bullying he faced. This was not an isolated incident as there are many heartbreaking stories of young people injuring themselves, or worse yet, taking their own lives because of bullying.

“If your child was bullied in school, wouldn’t you want to know? That’s the question I’ve asked many times to parents, education officials and my colleagues in the legislature and not a single person has said, ‘no, I’d rather not know.’ Unfortunately, due to a loophole in state

law, many parents are not being kept informed about incidents of bullying taking place in the institutions we trust to educate and look after the safety and well-being of our children each day,” said **Senator Jim Tedisco, Ranking Member of the Senate Education Committee**, who served close to a decade as a special education teacher and guidance counselor and has a master’s degree in special education.

“As any adult can attest, bullying has existed within the bricks and mortar of our schools for years. It used to be that once a child left school grounds and got off the bus they were largely free from the unforgiving taunts and physical abuse caused by bullies. The prevalence of social media and smart phones have compounded the problem by giving bullies a weapon of mass destruction to harass and torment their victims exponentially 24-7. Through ‘Jacobe’s Law’ schools will be required to make parents aware of threats of violence to their children so that a parent or guardian can take action they deem appropriate and have input on decisions of how best to protect their child’s safety and emotional well-being,” said Tedisco.

“Supporting S44 and enacting ‘Jacobe's Law’ is crucial in our commitment to protecting our children and ensuring their safety. By requiring school administrators to contact parents or guardians when bullying or harassment occurs, we take a significant step towards preventing future tragedies. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Senator Tedisco for championing this bill and advocating for the well-being of our students. Together, let us create an environment where every child can learn, thrive, and be free from the fear of bullying,” said **Senator Luis Sepulveda**.

“The death of 13-year-old Jacobe Taras in 2015 due to suicide after bullying by other students is a tragic scenario I hope to never see play out in any other school with any other children,” said **Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh**. “With the passage of ‘Jacobe’s Law’ (A.2231), schools would be required to inform parents of this behavior which would allow them to make an

informed decision on how to best protect their bullied child. The direction of a child's health and well-being belongs in the hands of parents, not school administrators. This bill was not supported by the Assembly Majority; however, I don't believe any member could truthfully say that if their child was being bullied, they would not want to know."

"Parents have a right to know what's going on with their children as our schools should be safe places for children to enjoy learning and not fear for their physical and emotional well-being. Bullying is not 'kids just being kids,' it's abusive behavior that can have devastating and potentially fatal consequences as my family knows all too well," said **Christine Taras, Jacobe's mother**. "If we had known what was going on behind school and bus doors, which was detailed in Jacobe's suicide note, we know he would still be with us today. Now all we have are our broken hearts and memories. We thank Senator Tedisco and Assemblywoman Walsh for their leadership in sponsoring this bill. We hope Jacobe's story can help lead to positive change and save lives."

"Bullying has real consequences that can impact people for the rest of their lives. When I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, a school bully yanked my chair out from under me, causing a concussion, fractured tailbone, and neck and back injuries. The effects of the concussion left me with NDPH and Occipital Neuralgia--two rare and debilitating headache disorders. There's no place for bullying in our schools and we need to make sure that parents and guardians have all the information they need to protect their children so they can intervene and prevent bullying at school from turning into a tragedy. If the statistics and incidences of bullying are important enough to report to the administrators at State Ed, then they are important enough to make parents aware of to intervene to develop a plan of action and potentially help avert a tragedy. That's why passing "Jacobese Law" is so important," said **Isabella Sementilli of Niskayuna**, a small businesswoman and anti-bullying advocate.



“There is nothing more important than the health, mental health, and wellness of our children,” offered **Kyle Belokopitsky, NYS PTA Executive Director**. “We thank the sponsors of this legislation for their commitment to our children. Parents and families continue worry about bullying, cyber bullying, and the wellness of our children. Family engagement and continued conversations and partnership between school and home is critical. We look forward to working with the legislature on a solution on these complicated issues.”



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## 2023-S44

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- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
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- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
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Enacts [Jacobe's Law](#)

December 27, 2022

In Senate Committee [Education](#)

Sponsored by [James Tedisco](#)

Do you support this bill?