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Testimony; Senate Bill 323
Senate Education Committee
Jan. 26, 2016

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to express our support for Senate Bill 323.

Suicide is a critical problem and very often when you read of a suicide, people will say they never saw any sign that it was coming. This is because very few of us are really trained to see the warning signs.

Teachers and principals spend a lot of time with young people - only their parents have more time. Just as we train teachers and principals to watch for signs of abuse and make them mandatory reporters of suspected abuse, it is proper to consider that a teacher or principal could notice some behavior or change in behavior that might be a warning sign of suicide.

As this bill is written, it is not an excessive burden on the employee or the district. There is wide latitude on how such a training requirement could be met. We also know that some resources based on best practices are now available at no cost online.

If the committee should decide to work this bill, we would only ask that you consider two possible issues.

First, while training that meets the requirement of the bill is available at no cost now, there is no telling what might happen in the future. We ask that you ensure that the professional development in our schools is funded such that this could not become an unfunded mandate.

Secondly, we would ask you to consider the issue of liability. In a litigious society, is it not conceivable that someone might sue school personnel should a child commit suicide? We do not believe that any training in spotting warning signs of suicide could guarantee the end of successful suicides. Just because a teacher or principal is trained does not ensure that they will always spot the warnings.