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Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 278

Senator Schodorf and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I appear today on behalf of the Shawnee Mission School District #512 in opposition to Senate Bill 278.

All school districts are already required to have a policy prohibiting bullying, which includes a definition and required mediation and possible consequences. School districts have disciplinary measures in place, as well as anonymous reporting mechanisms for which victims can report bullying. SB 278 requires substantial reporting and increases the authority of the school district to extend to matters of the home for events not occurring on school property or at a school event.

SB278 inserts additional restrictive timelines for school personnel to respond, investigate and remediate reports of bullying. When reports are made, school officials respond swiftly and make it a high priority to investigate any and all claims. These investigations are time consuming and investigating within 24 hours of the initial report may not be possible. If witnesses are absent, or if it occurs on the weekend, there is little possibility for the investigation to begin. In fact, at times, rushing through an investigation by an imposed timeline can be more detrimental than thoroughly investigating and ensuring all details and witnesses are reviewed. These time constraints have been proposed when the number of school officials and teachers have been decreased due to funding constraints. There are fewer personnel such as counselors, teachers, administrators and classified staff in which to deal with the daily operations of a school. Adding additional time constraints to already a full schedule increases the likelihood of litigation.

SB 278 also requires counseling services for victims. This is not a cost the school district can absorb. The typical counselor in secondary schools has a 350:1 ratio and cannot be expected to provide counseling services during the school day. Training for staff members has been completed during a time when staff development funding has been decreased.

School districts are required to report criminal activities to local law enforcement and advise parents of their right to file criminal complaints, but requiring these investigative reports to be released could violate the privacy of individuals as well as jeopardize the learning environment. Staff members would be required to testify and further pull them away from the position of educating students.

Schools are tasked with determining what occurred from both individuals' perspectives