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1ST SESSION

S. 986

To address and take action to prevent bullying and harassment of students.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 12, 2025

Mr. KAINE (for himself, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. BENNET, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. COONS, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. FETTERMAN, Mr. HICKENLOOPER, Ms. HIRONO, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MERKLEY, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. PADILLA, Mr. PETERS, Ms. ROSEN, Mr. SANDERS, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Ms. SMITH, Mr. WARNER, Ms. WARREN, Mr. WELCH, Mr. WYDEN, and Mr. MURPHY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To address and take action to prevent bullying and harassment of students.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Safe Schools Improve-
5 ment Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Bullying and harassment foster a climate of
2 fear and disrespect that can seriously impair the
3 physical and psychological health of its victims and
4 create conditions that negatively affect learning,
5 thereby undermining the ability of students to
6 achieve their full potential.

7 (2) Bullying and harassment contribute to high
8 dropout rates, increased absenteeism, and academic
9 underachievement.

10 (3) Bullying and harassment include a range of
11 behaviors that negatively impact a student's ability
12 to learn and participate in educational opportunities
13 and activities that schools offer. Such behaviors can
14 include hitting or punching, name-calling, intimidat-
15 ion through gestures or social exclusion, and send-
16 ing insulting or offensive messages through elec-
17 tronic communications, such as internet sites, e-
18 mail, instant messaging, mobile phones and mes-
19 saging, telephone, or any other means.

20 (4) Schools with enumerated anti-bullying and
21 harassment policies have an increased level of re-
22 porting and teacher intervention in incidents of bul-
23 lying and harassment, thereby reducing the overall
24 frequency and number of such incidents.

1 (5) Students have been particularly singled out
2 for bullying and harassment on the basis of their ac-
3 tual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex,
4 disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity,
5 sex characteristics (including intersex traits), or reli-
6 gion, among other categories.

7 (6) Some young people experience a form of
8 bullying called relational aggression or psychological
9 bullying, which harms individuals by damaging,
10 threatening, or manipulating their relationships with
11 their peers, or by injuring their feelings of social ac-
12 ceptance.

13 (7) Interventions to address bullying and har-
14 assment should incorporate evidence-based discipline
15 policies and practices, such as Positive Behavior
16 Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and other re-
17 storative practices that can minimize suspensions,
18 expulsions, and other exclusionary and harmful dis-
19 cipline policies to ensure that students are not
20 “pushed-out” or diverted to the juvenile justice sys-
21 tem.

22 (8) Perpetrators of bullying and harassment
23 often have a history of trauma or psychological dis-
24 tress, or have been bullied themselves. These stu-
25 dents, often discussed as “bully-victims”, require ad-

1 ditional trauma-informed interventions and consider-
2 ation.

3 **SEC. 3. SAFE SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENT.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Title IV of the Elementary and
5 Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7101 et
6 seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

7 **“PART G—SAFE SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENT**

8 **“SEC. 4701. PURPOSE.**

9 “The purpose of this part is to address the problem
10 of bullying and harassment conduct of students in public
11 elementary schools and secondary schools.

12 **“SEC. 4702. ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES.**

13 “(a) BULLYING.—In this part, the term ‘bullying’
14 means conduct that adversely affects the ability of one or
15 more students to participate in or benefit from the school’s
16 educational programs or activities by placing a student in
17 fear of harm.

18 “(b) POLICIES.—A State that receives a grant under
19 this title shall require all local educational agencies in the
20 State to carry out the following:

21 “(1) Establish policies that prevent and prohibit
22 conduct, including bullying and harassment, that—

23 “(A) limits a student’s ability to partici-
24 pate in, or benefit from, a program or activity

1 of a public school or local educational agency;
2 or

3 “(B) creates a hostile or abusive edu-
4 cational environment, adversely affecting a stu-
5 dent’s education, at a program or activity of a
6 public school or local educational agency, in-
7 cluding acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical
8 aggression or intimidation.

9 “(2) The policies required under paragraph (1)
10 shall include a prohibition of bullying or harassment
11 conduct based on—

12 “(A) a student’s actual or perceived race,
13 color, national origin, sex (including sexual ori-
14 entation, gender identity, and sex characteris-
15 tics (including intersex traits)), disability, or re-
16 ligion;

17 “(B) the actual or perceived race, color,
18 national origin, sex (including sexual orienta-
19 tion, gender identity, and sex characteristics
20 (including intersex traits)), disability, or reli-
21 gion of a person with whom a student associ-
22 ates or has associated; or

23 “(C) any other distinguishing characteris-
24 tics that may be defined by the State or local
25 educational agency.

1 “(3) Provide—

2 “(A) annual notice to students, parents,
3 and educational professionals describing the full
4 range of prohibited conduct contained in such
5 local educational agency’s discipline policies;
6 and

7 “(B) grievance procedures for students or
8 parents to register complaints regarding the
9 prohibited conduct contained in such local edu-
10 cational agency’s discipline policies, including—

11 “(i) the name of the local educational
12 agency officials who are designated as re-
13 sponsible for receiving such complaints;
14 and

15 “(ii) timelines that the local edu-
16 cational agency will establish in the resolu-
17 tion of such complaints.

18 “(4) Collect annual incidence and frequency of
19 incidents data about the conduct prohibited by the
20 policies described in paragraph (1) at the school
21 level that are accurate and complete and publicly re-
22 port such data at the school level and local edu-
23 cational agency level. The local educational agency
24 shall ensure that victims or persons responsible for
25 such conduct are not identifiable.

1 **“SEC. 4703. STATE REPORTS.**

2 “The chief executive officer of a State that receives
3 a grant under this title, in cooperation with the State edu-
4 cational agency, shall submit a biennial report to the Sec-
5 retary—

6 “(1) on the information reported by local edu-
7 cational agencies in the State pursuant to section
8 4702(b)(4); and

9 “(2) describing the State’s plans for supporting
10 local educational agency efforts to address the con-
11 duct prohibited by the policies described in section
12 4702(b)(1).

13 **“SEC. 4704. EVALUATION.**

14 “(a) BIENNIAL EVALUATION.—The Secretary shall
15 conduct an independent biennial evaluation of programs
16 and policies to combat bullying and harassment in elemen-
17 tary schools and secondary schools, including implementa-
18 tion of the requirements described in section 4702, includ-
19 ing whether such requirements have appreciably reduced
20 the level of the prohibited conduct and have conducted ef-
21 fective parent involvement and training programs.

22 “(b) DATA COLLECTION.—The Commissioner for
23 Education Statistics shall collect data from States, that
24 are subject to independent review, to determine the inci-
25 dence and frequency of conduct prohibited by the policies
26 described in section 4702.

1 “(c) BIENNIAL REPORT.—Not later than January 1,
 2 2026, and every 2 years thereafter, the Secretary shall
 3 submit to the President and Congress a report on the find-
 4 ings of the evaluation conducted under subsection (a) to-
 5 gether with the data collected under subsection (b) and
 6 data submitted by the States under section 4703.

7 **“SEC. 4705. EFFECT ON OTHER LAWS.**

8 “(a) FEDERAL AND STATE NONDISCRIMINATION
 9 LAWS.—Nothing in this part shall be construed to invali-
 10 date or limit rights, remedies, procedures, or legal stand-
 11 ards available to victims of discrimination under any other
 12 Federal law or law of a State or political subdivision of
 13 a State, including title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
 14 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.), title IX of the Education
 15 Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.), section
 16 504 or 505 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C.
 17 794, 794a), or the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
 18 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.). The obligations imposed by this
 19 part are in addition to those imposed by title VI of the
 20 Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.), title
 21 IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C.
 22 1681 et seq.), section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of
 23 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794), and the Americans with Disabil-
 24 ities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.).

1 “(b) FREE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION LAWS.—Noth-
 2 ing in this part shall be construed to alter legal standards
 3 regarding, or affect the rights (including remedies and
 4 procedures) available to individuals under, other Federal
 5 laws that establish protections for freedom of speech or
 6 expression.

7 **“SEC. 4706. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**

8 “Nothing in this part shall be construed to prohibit
 9 a State or local entity from enacting any law with respect
 10 to the prevention of bullying or harassment of students
 11 that is not inconsistent with this part.”.

12 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents in
 13 section 2 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
 14 of 1965 is amended by inserting after the item relating
 15 to section 4644 the following:

“PART G—SAFE SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENT

“Sec. 4701. Purpose.

“Sec. 4702. Anti-bullying policies.

“Sec. 4703. State reports.

“Sec. 4704. Evaluation.

“Sec. 4705. Effect on other laws.

“Sec. 4706. Rule of construction.”.

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