

House Education

03/06/2024 Upon Adjournment

HB24-1285 Student Weight-Based Bullying Prevention

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Meghan Taylor For herself	Thank you members of the committee. My name is Meghan Taylor, I have served on several political campaigns, sit currently within government commission seats, and participate on advocacy committees in my community, but I am still a teenager. I participate in choir and all the theater I can, but I am still a teenager. Most teenagers are uncomfortable with their bodies or insecure, I especially have had to fight for myself to allow myself space in these places that I am in, just because when I was 6 years old I got hit and punched every single day during recess for being too fat, too kind-hearted, too easy of a target. This bill will allow a kindness for the children who become teenagers who become adults to live their lives without having the trauma that I and so many others grew up with. Vote yes on HB24-1285, thank you.

Support for HB24-1285

Thank you, committee members for your time and attention today. My name is Liss Smith, and I'm the Communications & Advocacy Director with Inside Out Youth Services, an LGBTQIA2+ youth-serving nonprofit in Colorado Springs.

Inside Out Youth Services supports HB24-1285 because nationwide, including at our community center, LGBTQIA2+ youth report higher levels of bullying than their peers ([source](#)). Though sexual orientation and gender identity are thankfully protected under our existing anti-bullying laws, these youth continue to find themselves victimized for other aspects of their identities.

Unfortunately, because weight and appearance are not enumerated in anti-bullying protections, instances of weight-based bullying may not be treated with the same level of concern as bullying related to protected classes.

We also know that there is an intersection between LGBTQIA2+ people and poor health outcomes, including substance use, binge drinking, and obesity ([source](#)). This means the very youth who are meant to be protected by our anti-bullying laws are still finding themselves victimized without recourse. Even if families, schools, and other close connections are supportive of a student's LGBTQIA2+ identity, weight-based bullying can cause depressive symptoms, poor self-esteem, and other mental health challenges in an LGBTQIA2+ student. ([source](#))

We know from decades of research, our work at Inside Out, and our youth participants, that bullying is not a one-time trauma. Bullying, especially sustained over many years, causes lifelong health disparities and issues such as eating disorders and body dysmorphia. ([source](#))

Growing up, I was bullied for both my sexuality and my weight, and I've never fully moved on from those experiences. It was true with me, as it is true with all students, that mental health improves with kindness, affirmation, and of course policies that protect students and all aspects of who they are.

Supporting this bill is a small but vital step in improving the health of our state's students and the adults they're growing to become. We ask you to vote yes on HB24-1285.

Liss Smith

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Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Talia Eagle, and I am an undergraduate psychology student at the University of Washington, but that is not why I'm writing this. I am fully in support of this incredibly important bill: weight and size is a major factor of identity that is frequently overlooked, especially when it comes to anti-bullying measures.

When I was nine years old, I began facing a number of challenges that would make developing a positive opinion of myself and my body very challenging. I entered puberty fairly early, well before many of my classmates, causing me to gain a lot of weight. My dad also passed away unexpectedly that year, and that intense period of grief and pain caused me to turn from a girl who was praised for being thin to a girl who was ridiculed for her size.

The way my fourth grade teacher treated me flipped almost overnight. I had never been her favorite student, but she definitely lost any respect for me she had during that time. She berated me for missing two weeks of school after I had *lost my father*. She yelled at me every time I showed up late for school (which was nearly every day). She frequently dumped out my desk, telling my class how disgusting and messy it was, and how there were so many snacks in there it was no wonder I was chubby.

My biggest bully was my fourth grade teacher. A woman in her forties took it upon herself to treat a grieving nine-year-old that way. I have no way of knowing if she would have treated me differently had I been skinny, but I have a strange suspicion that she would have.

The ridicule I faced during this period, from both my teacher and my classmates, led me to develop a deep hatred for myself. This hatred extended to every part of me, my personality, my voice, my demeanor, and, most significantly, my body. I developed some disordered eating habits during this time that persisted well after I had lost that weight, and that wouldn't leave me until high school.

I still struggle with my appearance, and it is painful and angering to think that this all started when my teacher, someone who was supposed to take care of me and simply guide me through elementary-level curriculum, took it upon herself to shame me for my messiness and my weight, compounding on the emotional hardship I was already experiencing. After my school caught wind of this abuse, this teacher was demoted. However, she now teaches physical education, and I fear for every student in her class, especially those in larger bodies.

This story is my own, but versions of it echo across this state, as well as across the world. All students deemed "too large" and "unhealthy" by parents, peers, and teachers face this kind of abuse, and much worse, every day we do not act. These survivors of weight-based bullying deserve to be protected. Thank you.