

Testimony on Senate Bill 198

Chairperson, Members of the Committee:

For the record, I am Dr. Claudette Morton, of Helena, Montana. I am testifying as a private citizen, but I have been involved professionally with Montana Public Education for over 40 years. During that time I have seen many changes in Montana public schools, most of them improve our children's education. However, an area we have often neglected and continue to in many schools is the issue of harassment, intimidation or bullying. First of all, it is an issue that many educators do not know how to address, nor feel comfortable in handling, so many ignore it. It occurs in elementary and secondary schools and in large and small schools. The problem is that what the actions actually are saying is that both the bully and the bullied need help to get along in a society that has ever more complex relationships and requires tolerance.

At one time, I taught educators listening skills and we learned that listening is active, not passive. For a lot of us we heard the taunts, but we have not listened to them. If we had we would, in the words of Professor Sara Lundsteen, "listen to the sound of the quietly breaking heart" of both the bully and the bullied. We would know that we must do something about it, before the bullied have no alternative but to take matters in their own hands, or before the bully learns an inappropriate method to get his way, which will ultimately set him up for failure in relationships.

I hope you will support Senator Kitzenberg's bill so that all of us in the public schools of Montana will learn to truly listen and act to help all our children learn to get along in the world. Thank you.