

SB141

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Chanda Merkel and I am a freshman at Helena High School. I am here in support of Senate Bill 141 because I know what it feels like to be bullied. Since the beginning of my freshman year, I have experienced being pushed around by many people. In groups of bullies, there is usually one queen bee. In my case, the queen bee of the group had the ability to befriend anyone; peers, teachers, parents, and coaches, and she was able to use this against me.

Every day I was called names, given rude gestures, tripped and pushed in hallways, and talked about loud enough so that I could hear every word said. I felt a tremendous amount of fear every time I had to walk through the halls of my school. I had at least one of them in every one of my classes, so staying away from them was out of my control.

I thought I should have been able to handle the situation myself because I know I am a strong person. But these girls knew how to bully. They never put anything in writing, so when I got to the point where I thought I needed to talk to someone, I had nothing I could prove. I knew it would be their work against mine. I confronted some of the girls a few times but they would just laugh at me and say they were just kidding.

I tried to continue on as if all was fine, but eventually I couldn't take it. I would make new friends and these girls would befriend them and be sure to leave me out. Together they would start rumors saying things like I was pregnant; I was dating someone else's boyfriend, and many other hurtful things that turned people against me. I was to the point where I didn't want to go to school. I didn't want to try out for basketball because I knew we would all make the team, I was even avoiding social events. I would get home and go to my room and wouldn't let anyone in. I wanted to die, just simply disappear.

My mom finally convinced me I had to talk to someone. This was a very scary thought for me because I knew there was a chance of the situation getting worse. I went to one of the school counselors and told

her my story. She told me how serious it was and that she had no choice but to go to the administration. Some of the girls were talked to, which made the bullying worse, but after a few days, a majority of them stopped.

Everything settled down for a couple of months, but then two of the same girls picked up the bullying again. This time I was sure I was going to get beat up. I was being threatened in the halls and again being called names. I once again didn't want to go to school because I thought I was truly unsafe, and I again felt like I didn't want to live.

I didn't understand why I was always the target, and I started to feel like I deserved it, like I wasn't good enough for anyone or anything.

I didn't want to bring the situation forward because I felt like I was a snitch and I was always bringing up drama. One day a teacher heard the things they were saying to me and told me I really needed to talk to someone and she would be a witness. I again went to a school counselor and she brought in an administrator right away. I told him what was going on and he said he would let my teachers know and talk to the girls. Both of the girls wrote me notes saying I better not tell on them again. I gave the notes to the administrator and he once again talked to them and they haven't yet said anything else to me. None of these girls like me, which is perfectly fine with me, and they all have their days when they are mean, but I can deal with that. The only thing I can't deal with is the every day thought that this is always happening to somebody, and it could happen to me again. I don't enjoy high school like my peers do because I am always having to watch what I do and say, and I feel like I can't be myself. Nobody can have fun acting like something they aren't, and I don't want anyone to ever have to feel the way I do. This is why I believe bullying should be addressed in all schools because no one should feel unsafe at school and be afraid of being themselves.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit my testimony.