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## **House OKs measure that would pressure schools to curb bullying**

By Christine McCluskey , Journal Inquirer

**HARTFORD - The House has approved legislation that would broaden the definition of school bullying and penalize school systems that fail to implement bullying policies.**

The bill, which lawmakers already have adjusted several times, probably will change again before the Senate votes on it.

Sen. Thomas P. Gaffey, D-Meriden and co-chairman of the Education Committee, said he disagrees with a line in the bill that releases school administrators from having to explain to parents how staff members responded to bullying.

Privacy concerns that prompted the provision are unfounded because only the parents of the students involved would be notified, Gaffey said.

The bill revises legislation enacted in 2003 that requires school systems to develop bullying policies and record verified bullying incidents.

Some lawmakers, including Gaffey and the other Education Committee co-chairman, Rep. Andrew M. Fleischmann, D-West Hartford, became concerned that school systems could be sweeping bullying incidents under the rug when they saw that some reported no bullying at all.

The legislation requires that school systems not only develop a policy but implement one and outlines a financial penalty for not doing so. The state could withhold between \$2,500 and \$10,000 of a school system's Education Cost Sharing money if no bullying policy is implemented.

Rep. Mary M. Mushinsky, D-Wallingford, said Monday the penalty is "really a signal from the state that we do take the law seriously and we do want honest reports."

Rep. Pamela Z. Sawyer, R-Bolton, said she voted against the bill because she's concerned about the penalties. She said the state should help school systems work against bullying by providing financial and administrative support, not by penalizing them for failing to complete reports.

The latest version of the amended bill passed the House 108-39 last week.

The legislation also attempts to broaden the definition of bullying. Mushinsky said when she wrote the anti-bullying bill several years ago, she defined bullying as repeated acts of ridicule or harassment against a student.

But what if a bully repeatedly harasses a different student each time?

The definition was revised in this bill simply to categorize bullying as multiple acts of harassment, regardless of whether they are aimed at one student or several.

Mushinsky added that her original definition of multiple incidents against one victim also should be included in the bill, to show a clear standard of what bullying is.

But she also said what's really needed to stop bullying is for a school to change its climate, and this can be done only if everyone from students to teachers to administrators is trained to deal with bullying

instead of watching it happen.

Staff writer Ben Rubin contributed to this report.