

**Testimony of
Cindy Mazzotta
East Hampton Teacher**

Before the Education Committee

Re: HB 7110 AAC Enhanced Classroom Safety and School Climate

February 22, 2019

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Cindy Mazzotta. I have been a teacher for the past 19 years in East Hampton. Thank you for taking the time to consider HB 7110.

When I began teaching grade 3, the majority of children came from homes with the typical story: supportive parents, siblings, a secure home. Things have changed in the past 4 years. My colleagues and I have seen a huge shift in our school community. Students now come to school with a tremendous amount of baggage that they didn't ask for and we are not equipped to deal with it.

And the expectations of teachers continue to transform: curriculum, differentiated instruction, gathering data, inform families of progress, provide social/emotional and the list goes on and on.

For the past two years I have not loved my job and have thought about what else I could do with my experience. Too many times, each day is filled with students who refuse to do work, destroy classrooms, punch or hit classmates or teachers, yell profanities, elope and hide.

And now, here is my story. At the beginning of this year, I was a first grade teacher in a classroom filled with 20 bright eyed students who were just as excited about the new school year as I was. My strength has always been establishing relationships with kids and families. This year was no different, until it was.

By week two, I had 2 students who refused to work, screamed and yelled throughout daily lessons and activities, eloped from the classroom, climbed furniture, threw books, were aggressive towards peers filling their classmates with fear. I repeatedly asked for help from administration so I could protect my students, met with a team of school professionals and constantly contacted their families.

By November, I sat with my administrator telling him I didn't feel safe in my room. I was told that many teachers have challenging students in their class. The next day, the student that I was afraid of shoved me into my classroom door and I injured my back. He was upset because he

was going to work in his buddy classroom, which was the protocol my administrator asked me to follow.

This was the first time something like this had ever happened to me and I was devastated. On the day of the incident, the student was removed from my class and I was expected to continue to teach. When I returned to school on the next day with severe back pain, I sat in a 90 minute meeting being drilled with questions about the role I played in this assault. I was made to feel as if I caused it. The student was permanently placed back in my room. I was scared, tense and I couldn't breathe thinking it is going to happen again. The connections I worked so hard to establish with this child didn't matter, I was going to get hurt again so I couldn't do it! I couldn't be in the classroom anymore.

Between the back pain and the emotional distress, I stayed out of the classroom for the next two weeks sitting in isolation, sadness and fear. I didn't want to go anywhere or be with anyone.

I decided to try and return to school for a half-day schedule and the district had protocols in place to help me address safety concerns. It didn't work and it wasn't going to. Eventually I was offered a different position.

That's the thing! I was removed from the classroom, me, the victim. Not the assailant because his identity, his story needed to be protected.

For this child, what he did to me is a distant memory. He still hugs me every morning as he jumps of the bus ready for his day. But when he hugs me, I am always brought back to that moment. I am reminded daily that I am no longer the teacher in room 20.

Thank you!