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March 10, 2015

To: Members of the Education Committee
From: Jenna Sutton, Policy Associate
Re: Support for LB 572

The internet has become an increasingly integral part of young peoples' lives. Children and teens are spending more time on the internet than ever before, most often using social media websites for social interaction. Unfortunately, this leads to a growing issue with cyberbullying. According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, 2.2 million U.S. students reported being harassed or threatened online in 2011 compared to the 1.5 million students in 2009.¹

The effects of cyberbullying can be severe and long-lasting. Both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying are at a much greater risk for depression, anxiety, stress-related disorders, including those that affect sleep or eating habits, suicidal behaviors, and dropping out of school. Children who are bullied are particularly more likely to have health complaints and struggle with school participation and academic achievement. Children who are perpetrators of bullying are more likely to have substance abuse issues in adolescence and in adulthood, behavioral issues, have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults, and act abusively toward significant others or towards children as adults. Bystanders of bullying are also at greater risk of skipping school, having mental health problems, and dealing with substance abuse issues.²

Middle School aged kids are at the height of cyberbullying occurrences and helping schools implement a plan for combating cyberbullying is critical in preventing the aforementioned harmful and enduring consequences to all parties involved. Schools need both prevention and intervention techniques in order to deal appropriately with cyberbullying incidences and offer help to victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.

After reviewing all available published research, the Cyberbullying Research Center concluded that 1 out of every 4 middle school and high school students has experienced cyberbullying and 1 in 6 students has been a perpetrator.³ As an issue that affects so many children regardless of gender or socioeconomic status, it is important that these kids learn what cyberbullying looks like, how to prevent it, how to respond in situations when it occurs, and how to cope in order to minimize its negative impact.

We urge the committee to advance LB 572 in order to protect our children from the harmful effects of cyberbullying.

Thank you.

¹ Cyberbullying Research Center (2015) Cyberbullying Facts

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, stopbullying.gov

³ See note 1