



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 1698		DATE: 2/4/2026
COMMITTEE: Elementary and Secondary Education		
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES		
WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. AC DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 11:35 PM

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I believe that these Policies are already in place in Our State's 518-Public School Districts.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: LARA WAKEFIELD		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 12:22 PM
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My name is Dr. Lara Wakefield and I'm an advocate for children with disabilities in Missouri representing over 400 families in 27 school districts. We are in support of this bill. Around 40% of my clients have been the victim of bullying, harassment, and assault at school. Sadly, school staff either did not report as required or they reported months later for the situation to be investigated. The two day timeline is necessary. Also, another problem that is a significant problem is that investigations were not conducted within 10 days and there is no accountability related to that. We appreciate Rep. Christensen sponsoring this bill.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: LIAM NOLAN ROBERTSON		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 1:13 PM
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I support this bill as I was bullied on the bus in 7th grade.



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: LISA PANNETT		PHONE NUMBER:
REPRESENTING: ARMORVINE		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 65101
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 12:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SARAH MOORE		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:		SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 12:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME		
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:		
WITNESS NAME: SHIRA BERKOWITZ	PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: PROMO	TITLE:	
ADDRESS:		
CITY: ST. LOUIS	STATE: MO	ZIP: 63104
EMAIL: Shira@promomissouri.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 11:01 PM
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.		

PROMO Missouri supports HB 1698, Rep. Christensen's bill on antibullying policies. But would like to go on record noting a preference to amend the language focused on law enforcement notification/requirements. For too many of our state's youth, attending school can be a frightening experience. Rather than focusing on their education, many students struggle just to come to school and be themselves without being punished for wearing clothes or using facilities consistent with who they are. Some are denied opportunities to go on field trips or participate in sports. Together with bullying and harassment, these conflicts can lead to disproportionate discipline, school pushout, and involvement in the juvenile justice system.

We believe this bill helps close some of the policy gaps that have allowed bullying to go unchecked and increase instances of violence in our schools. Amending language regarding law enforcement notification/requirements would additionally support environments of mitigating bullying. We agree, all students deserve to feel safe, supported, and cared for within their school environments, including transgender students. And most adults would agree, with the clear exception of a few (perhaps specific lobbyist testifying in support of this bill) who believe that transgender youth are not bullied enough, therefore they ought to not only carve out an exemption allowing trans youth to be bullied, they should take the opportunity to bully them too.

Young people who are LGBTQ+ (or perceived to be) are taunted, harassed, and bullied, sometimes relentlessly, at far greater percentages than their straight and cis-gender peers. 49% of LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-17 reported being bullied in-person within the past year, and 26% of those ages 18-24 reported the same. 35% of LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-17 reported that they had been electronically (cyber) bullied during the past year, and 24% of those ages 18-24 reported the same.

In Missouri, 29% of high school students say they have experienced being bullied either in person or online. Of students who have experienced bullying, one in ten say they have seriously considered attempting suicide.

Schools are responsible for preventing and addressing a hostile school climate connected to its policies, practices, or related discussions, and we look forward to further conversations on how this policy can lead to stronger school guidance and guidelines when addressing bullying and make school environments safer for all Missouri students.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SYDNEY ARNOLD		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: KORTNIE HUDDLESTON		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 10:58 PM	

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I oppose this bill as a profound step backward for student safety and equity. While purporting to address bullying, its core mandate—that policies “shall not contain specific lists of protected classes of students”—is a direct attack on vulnerable youth.

This provision effectively prohibits schools from explicitly naming and prioritizing protections for students historically and disproportionately targeted for bullying: LGBTQ+ youth, students of color, students with disabilities, and others. By demanding “equal treatment” in a context of systemic inequality, the bill institutionalizes neglect. It forbids the targeted, evidence-based policies necessary to create true safety for marginalized groups.

Furthermore, the bill’s hostility toward “zero-tolerance” policies, while sometimes valid, is framed here to potentially shield bullies from meaningful accountability, prioritizing a false notion of “neutrality” over victim safety. Coupled with an overbroad immunity clause for school districts, it risks leaving victims without recourse.

True anti-bullying policy must be intersectional and recognize that bullying is not an equal-opportunity offense. It must empower schools to name, confront, and dismantle the specific prejudices that drive harassment. This bill does the opposite, mandating a color-blind, identity-blind approach that will only further harm the most at-risk students. It should be rejected.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: KRISTIN T. HILL		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/31/2026 10:46 PM	

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I think most of this would be ok....it's just two things that stand out to me as not ok- 1) that little part about having Principals or Designees be the ones to investigate the alleged incident(s) and 2) "Bullying" '.....that causes a reasonable student to fear for his or her physical safety or property.....'

Let me go over them one at a time-

1) The part of "...causes a REASONABLE student to fear for....." What is a "REASONABLE STUDENT"....Who gets to decide if the victim is a "Reasonable student"? Their teachers? The principle that only looks at grades? Someone from administration that hasn't had any interaction ever with the victim? It is imperative that any language that can be made into a hard line, is written as a hard line. This should very much say ".....that causes ANY OTHER (or ANOTHER) student to fear for THEIR safety (he or she is not inclusive to all. Saying 'their' hurts no one and includes everyone)

What are the qualifying parameters for "SUBSTANTIALLY INTERFERES WITH"? Who gets to decide what "SUBSTANTIAL" is.....This ambiguity leaves too much room for biased outcomes due to outside influences and not facts/evidence. For example, a principal or whoever this "designee" is (also too ambiguous) could already have a bias towards either the victim or the alleged perpetrator; influencing their decision one way or another. The principle could know one of the party's family members well and either like them or dislike them - influencing their decision regarding the student. The principal or designee could be negatively pressed by supervisors and school board members or admins to just quickly handle it and make a 'no evidence found' 'Issue resolved by administration' report.

This is not an acceptable route for parents of children who are experiencing bullying on any level. There are far too many problems (obviously there is enough of a problem to prompt you to make changes) with how bullying incidents are constantly ignored and swept under the rug, or of attempting to gaslight parents and victims into thinking they've blown this way out of proportion and horribly enough, telling the victim and their parents that 'they should just move schools' to get away from it. If you think I've made any of that up on my own, you give me way too much credit AND you are way more out of touch with the actual people that situations and House Bills like this are discussing

2) The definition of "bullying" MUST include "MENTAL HEALTH SAFETY" alongside physical safety and property. Y'all know by now that being mentally bullied is just as damaging to a young person as any other type of bullying and it should never be left out of consideration and should be clearly listed. If you can't handle the fact that the wording should include "their" and "mental health safety"....then you just don't need to be in your position any longer.

Now..if you've made it this far....congrats. Keep reading.

I will make the rest of this short because, frankly, I am tired and just done with the world for today

I want to offer up a suggestion for the policies that each district/charter school policy should include -- Require each school in each district to have an "Investigate/Intervene/Review" type of committee for every school. This committee would be made up of at least: 1 District Board Member from the boundary that the incident is related to, 2 Members of staff from the school (Principal and...? Maybe teacher that is NOT directly related to students involved), and 2-3 parents/guardians that are parents/guardians within the boundary line of school involved.

That committee can then meet, listen to the reports, statements, etc., deliberate, make a decision. THEN, whatever the outcome, this committee could also recommend what happens from there (while following policy guidelines)- Do they recommend or require either student involved to see the counselor on a set basis (I admit, I do not know the laws on this...if a school can require proof of counseling in order for a student to return to class or finish a suspension, etc.), review if there is anything that can be change regarding the perpetrator's class schedule to minimize contact with victim, make accommodation for perpetrator to be escorted to and from classes.....and maybe a type of intervention plan for the perpetrator....instead of just suspension or expulsion...and actual plan put together to try and get said student more on track to improve and succeed instead of just casting them off completely.

That all being said, of course there should be a line for if the offense moves into criminal offense territory in which Police should be contacted immediately to intervene or investigate.

Ok...hopefully I didn't miss a deadline taking forever to type this.

Thank you for hanging in there til the end!



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL DREYER		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 10:57 PM	

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Furthermore, the bill’s hostility toward “zero-tolerance” policies, while sometimes valid, is framed here to potentially shield bullies from meaningful accountability, prioritizing a false notion of “neutrality” over victim safety. Coupled with an overbroad immunity clause for school districts, it risks leaving victims without recourse.

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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SARAH BERRY		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/3/2026 10:03 AM	
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I respectfully oppose House Bill 1698.

Missouri law already requires school districts and charter schools to adopt, publish, and implement antibullying policies.

The PROBLEM facing Missouri students is not the absence of statutory authority, definitions, reporting timelines, or mandated procedures.

The PROBLEM is CHRONIC NONCOMPLIANCE, under-enforcement, and INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE TO FOLLOW EXISTING LAW.

House Bill 1698 substantially rewrites and expands section 160.775, RSMo, but it does not add meaningful enforcement mechanisms, independent oversight, or consequences for districts that routinely fail to comply with their current obligations.

As drafted, this bill risks functioning as symbolic legislation rather than corrective legislation.

Key Concerns

Redundancy Without Enforcement The bill restates and expands duties that already exist under current law—mandatory reporting, investigation timelines, parental notification, training requirements, and board review—without creating any external enforcement trigger when districts fail to act. Rewriting a statute that is already ignored does not protect students unless compliance is actually compelled.

Illusory Accountability Monthly reporting to school boards in closed session does not constitute meaningful accountability where boards themselves are often the final decision-makers in suppressing, minimizing, or recharacterizing incidents. The bill adds volume to internal paperwork while leaving districts in full control of whether violations are acknowledged or addressed.

Expanded Liability Shield Without Proven Compliance The bill broadens immunity and fee-shifting protections for districts and employees, even though there is no demonstrated baseline of consistent compliance with existing law.

Expanding liability protection before ensuring faithful implementation risks insulating misconduct rather than correcting it.

Misplaced Legislative Focus If Missouri intends to address bullying meaningfully, the focus should be on:

Independent audit or compliance review mechanisms

Clear consequences for failure to report or investigate

Transparent, public-facing compliance metrics

External escalation pathways when districts fail students

House Bill 1698 does none of these things.

Missouri does not suffer from a lack of antibullying statutes.

It suffers from a lack of enforcement.

Passing a more detailed version of a law that schools already do not follow creates the appearance of action without delivering protection.

Until the General Assembly addresses compliance failures directly, expanding section 160.775 will not materially change student safety outcomes.

Constitutional and Statutory Notes (for the Record)

Mo. Const. art. III, § 21 — laws should operate clearly and effectively; duplicative mandates without enforcement undermine legislative clarity.

Mo. Const. art. III, § 23 — legislation should not obscure responsibility or create illusory remedies.

Existing § 160.775, RSMo — already imposes core antibullying requirements that remain inconsistently enforced statewide.



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WITNESS NAME		
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:		
WITNESS NAME: DAVA-LEIGH BRUSH		PHONE NUMBER: 314-600-6018
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: MISSOURI EQUITY EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP		TITLE:
ADDRESS: PO BOX 1352		
CITY: ARNOLD		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 63010
EMAIL: dlb@missouriequity.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/4/2026 1:20 PM

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The Missouri Equity Education Partnership supports the idea of this bill, and agrees that bullying is a significant problem. We would like to see some guardrails in this bill. First, we have to acknowledge that without socio-emotional learning in early grades, some students do not know what bullying is. They are navigating socialization, especially at early ages, and learning to reconcile what is acceptable at home with what is acceptable at school. We would encourage adding SEL to the bill to educate children at early ages to help mitigate bullying later. Next we are also concerned about escalating law enforcement without training for teachers, admin...anyone who would make the decision to call it legal harassment. The school to prison pipeline is already a significant issue, so it needs to be handled with great care. Finally, we would also like to see built in training to know when first amendment rights cross a line to bullying. Sincerely held beliefs based on faith or home values do not necessarily excuse behavior. If a student continually uses racial slurs or misgenders students, and whether it escalates to physical results or not, then that should be included in a bullying definition. Words hurt as much, sometimes more, than physical attacks. Faith may be a shield but it shouldn't be a carte blanche for harassing/bullying people. We believe these changes, this bill would be one we could support.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: EMILY ANDROES		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/3/2026 11:02 PM

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My name is Emily Androes. I am currently a Master of Social Work student. I am submitting testimony to share conditional support and suggestions for amendments for HB 1698.

I appreciate that HB 1698 restricts zero-tolerance discipline for students who are victims and/or are defending others, and advise extending the restriction of zero-tolerance policy to all students involved in bullying. Research shows that zero-tolerance policies often do more harm than good and disproportionately impact students who are already vulnerable, without addressing the behavior. I also value that this bill includes therapeutic and skills-based interventions for both students who are bullied and students who engage in bullying behavior. However, I have concerns regarding the provisions related to referrals to law enforcement and the children’s division. While I understand the need for harassment to be taken seriously, I am concerned about the consequences for students and the aforementioned systems.

From a social work perspective, the children’s division and justice system are frequently overburdened without adequate resources. The text under Missouri’s law for harassment in the second degree is subjective, which, in practice, may lead to referrals being made out of fear of liability or uncertainty rather than out of necessity. I am also concerned about the potential impact on students who are overrepresented in the justice system and the children’s division, including students of color, students with disabilities, and students with a history of trauma.

For these reasons, I would support HB 1698 only if amended to include clearer safeguards around the children’s division and law-enforcement involvement. I urge consideration of the following amendments: Require schools to document that restorative, and therapeutic interventions have been attempted before referring a student to law enforcement or the children’s division, except in cases of immediate safety risk; clarify that referrals to law enforcement or the children’s division are only to be made after all other interventions have been exhausted as documented by the school.

With these changes, I believe this bill could address serious harm in schools while keeping them focused on support, growth, and accountability rather than punishment. As a future social worker, I strongly believe policies should protect student safety while minimizing unnecessary involvement with systems that can cause long-term harm.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
 Respectfully,

Emily Androes