



Dear Senate Committee Members,

I come before you today not only as the representative of the Bee a Rae of Sunshine Foundation but as a mother who has experienced the devastating effects of bullying firsthand. My name is Rachael Cash, and I am the founder of the Bee a Rae of Sunshine Foundation in which we work on Antibullying Initiatives, Youth Mental Health Awareness, Compassion for Animals and providing Scholarships. I started this foundation in memory of our MaKenzi Rae, our Rae of Sunshine. I am here to share with you the deeply personal story behind my support for SB1032, the Student Use of Force bill.

My daughter, MaKenzi Rae Cash, was a bright and loving 14-year-old who tragically passed away in December 2022. MaKenzi was a freshman at Westminster High School in Carroll County, and she was the victim of relentless bullying. Despite her courageous spirit, the constant harassment took a toll on her mental health. She was even physically attacked by a fellow student off school grounds, which only added to her anxiety as the bullying persisted within the school walls. This added anxiety caused the doctor to switch her antidepressant which resulted in tragic consequences after only thirty days on the new medication.

MaKenzi was strong and turned the other cheek in order to not escalate the situation or get in trouble. She simply wanted to pursue her dreams, including her aspiration to join the military and become a nurse. However, the fear of unfair consequences prevented her from defending herself. It is unjust that students in our state of Maryland should fear punishment for simply protecting themselves.

The current system's imbalance of consequences gives bullies too much power over their victims. This power dynamic is exacerbated by the prevalence of social media, where videos of school fights can further traumatize victims and embolden bullies. No student should have to endure an attack without the ability to defend themselves, especially when their suffering is being broadcast for public consumption.

SB1032 is a crucial piece of legislation that would empower victims of bullying to defend themselves without facing automatic consequences. This bill not only serves as a deterrent to bullies but also gives hope to students who are currently suffering in silence. By supporting SB1032, we can create safer school environments where every student feels empowered and protected.

In honor of my daughter and in solidarity with countless other students who face bullying every day, I urge you to support SB1032. Together, we can make a difference and ensure that no student feels helpless in the face of bullying. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachael Cash, Founder and Director of the Bee a Rae of Sunshine Foundation

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