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## **Favorable Support for HB1132– Public Schools: Student Fights, School Investigation, and Discipline**

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

My name is Rachael Cash, and I am the founder of the Bee a Rae of Sunshine Foundation, an organization dedicated to advocating for antibullying initiatives, youth mental health awareness, compassion for animals, and scholarship opportunities. Today, I write to you not only as a representative of this foundation but as a mother who has personally experienced the devastating consequences of bullying.

In December 2022, my 14-year-old daughter, MaKenzi Rae, tragically lost her life due to the overwhelming mental health effects of relentless bullying. MaKenzi was a bright, kind, and compassionate freshman at Westminster High School. She endured bullying both in person and online and was even physically attacked off school grounds by another student. This assault was recorded and widely shared on social media, further amplifying her humiliation and distress. Despite her resilience, the bullying persisted at school, exacerbated by a policy that punishes victims equally alongside their aggressors.

MaKenzi was not afraid of her bullies—but she was afraid of getting in trouble if she defended herself. She aspired to join the military and become a nurse, and she knew that any disciplinary record could jeopardize her future. The fear of unjust punishment only deepened her anxiety and left her feeling powerless. Sadly, she is not alone in this struggle.

Under the current policy, students who are attacked are expected not to defend themselves or risk facing the same consequences as their attackers. This imbalance gives bullies too much power, particularly in the digital age, where videos of school fights not only further traumatize victims but also embolden aggressors.

In honor of my daughter and in solidarity with the countless students facing similar hardships, I urge you to support HB1132 – Public Schools: Student Fights, School Investigation, and Discipline. This legislation is critical in addressing the failures of the current system, protecting our youth, and preventing another mother from enduring the unbearable loss that I have suffered.

Thank you for your time and consideration. With your support, we can create safer schools, foster a culture of accountability, and truly protect the mental well-being of our children.

Sincerely,

**Rachael Cash**

Founder, Bee a Rae of Sunshine Foundation

