

Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee: My name is Ben Levinger, and I am testifying in support of House Bill 1168. I am a father of two boys at a public elementary school. I'm here today to talk about how House Bill 1168 will improve the response of school districts in times of crisis for students and families.

In the Spring of 2024, our school was thrown into crisis mode. My son's teacher was suddenly not in school anymore. Weeks later, we were told this individual was under investigation based on accusations from students. It was a confusing and stressful time to be a parent at our school. I believe that the messaging and support from the school district towards our community of parents and students could have been much better. While we understood why the school system wanted to stay silent about certain aspects of the situation, the basic response was silence across the board. We received no guidance from the school district about what we should or should not do. Should we discuss the incident with our child? If so, what should we say? How should we talk about it? With a lack of guidance or direction, each family was left to make these decisions on their own, which led to a variety of problems.

Furthermore, there was confusion about other matters. There was no information given on what to do if your child wanted to report an accusation or if your child may have seen something that could be useful for an investigation.

It was an overwhelming and painful moment to be a parent in our community. Unfortunately, we also felt like we had to navigate everything on our own. House Bill 1168 would help school districts create plans based on best practices for these incredibly difficult situations. This bill will make our schools a safer and more supportive place for our students.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 1168. Thank you.