



**Written Testimony of**

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**United States Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on  
“What Should America Do About Gun Violence?”  
January 30, 2013**

Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for this important and timely hearing on “What Should America Do About Gun Violence?”

Founded in 1881, the American Association of University Women has approximately 150,000 members and supporters, 1,000 branches, and 700 college and university partners nationwide. AAUW has a proud 132-year history of breaking through barriers for women and girls and has always been a strong supporter of public education. Today, AAUW continues its mission through education, research, advocacy, and philanthropy.

AAUW strongly supports “freedom from violence and fear of violence in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.”<sup>1</sup> AAUW members advocate for equitable school climates that are free of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Any serious discussion of gun violence prevention must consider the climate in schools, including eradicating bullying and harassment and properly training school professionals and bystander students. We must create programs that encourage kids to talk to adults about these difficult issues so that students can get the help they need.

As our nation’s leaders struggle to write gun violence prevention laws in the wake of recent tragedies, we must not squander the opportunity to address the root causes of gun violence in our schools. Although most of the headlines will focus on the bans on certain weapons, AAUW wants to draw attention to measures to create safe school environments that are free from bullying and harassment. Every student deserves a safe place to learn, and AAUW believes that maintaining a safe climate at schools is the bedrock component to ending school violence. AAUW has recently spoken about this issue in several forums, including the *Huffington Post* (see Attachment 1).

School harassment and bullying are cyclical and contribute to serious security risks. Harassers and bullies have often been harassed or bullied themselves. According to the 2002 *Safe School Initiative*

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<sup>1</sup> AAUW. (2011). *Biennial Action Priorities*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from [www.aauw.org/act/issue\\_advocacy/principles\\_priorities.cfm#biennial](http://www.aauw.org/act/issue_advocacy/principles_priorities.cfm#biennial)

report,<sup>2</sup> almost three-quarters of those who committed school violence felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others before doing so. AAUW's report *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment in School*<sup>3</sup> found similar results among students who sexually harass other students. In extreme cases, like the Taft High School shooting in California, the experience of being bullied appeared to have been a factor in the decision to attack the school.<sup>4</sup> A safe and supportive school climate is critical if we are to decrease violence at schools and gun violence overall.

*Crossing the Line* found that our country is dealing with a pervasive problem: Nearly half of all 7–12th grade students said that they have encountered some form of sexual harassment and that this harassment caused them to feel sick to their stomachs, have trouble sleeping, and skip school.<sup>5</sup> As we know, harassment can lead to disastrous outcomes, especially for students who are targeted for failing to conform to gender stereotypes, which is often the case for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students who report sexual harassment.<sup>6</sup>

Congress must act on several of President Barack Obama's proposals to create safer school climates.<sup>7</sup> These include a comprehensive school safety initiative to help local school districts hire up to 1,000 school resource officers and school-based mental health professionals, as well as other investments in school safety, such as providing resources for schools to implement emergency preparedness plans; helping schools adopt proven strategies to reduce bullying, drug abuse, violence, and other problem behaviors; and assisting schools in gathering and sharing best practices on school discipline.

AAUW supports the reintroduction and passage of the Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students Act,<sup>8</sup> which aims to improve student achievement by promoting student health and wellness; preventing bullying, violence, and drug use; and fostering a positive school climate. AAUW also supports the Safe Schools Improvement Act and the Student Non-Discrimination Act, which would give schools necessary resources to combat bullying, harassment, and negative school climates.

Our nation's schools should be the safest places possible for our children. We're pleased to see Congress exploring ways to prevent gun violence, and we look forward to supporting initiatives that protect all students.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We are pleased to be working with you on this critical issue.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from [www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> AAUW. (2011). *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment in School*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from [www.aauw.org/learn/research/crossingtheline.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/learn/research/crossingtheline.cfm)

<sup>4</sup> *Los Angeles Times*. (January 12, 2013). *Taft Classroom Shooting: Bullying Seen as Motive for Attack*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2013/01/taft-classroom-shooting-bullying-seen-as-motive-for-attack.html>

<sup>5</sup> AAUW. (2011). *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment in School*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from [www.aauw.org/learn/research/crossingtheline.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/learn/research/crossingtheline.cfm)

<sup>6</sup> Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network. (2011). *2011 National School Climate Survey: LGBT Youth Face Pervasive, But Decreasing Levels of Harassment*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from [www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2897.html?state=research&type=research](http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2897.html?state=research&type=research)

<sup>7</sup> The White House. (January 2013). *Now is the Time*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/wh\\_now\\_is\\_the\\_time\\_full.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/wh_now_is_the_time_full.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Government Printing Office. (MAY 9, 2011). *S. 919*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from [www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112s919is/pdf/BILLS-112s919is.pdf](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112s919is/pdf/BILLS-112s919is.pdf)

## Attachment 1



**Linda Hallman**

Executive Director, American Association of University Women



# Tackling the Role That Bullying and Harassment Play in School Violence

Posted: 02/01/2013 11:53 am

As our nation's leaders struggle to implement gun-violence prevention laws in the wake of the Sandy Hook tragedy, we must not squander the opportunity to address the root causes of gun violence in our schools. Although most of the headlines have focused on banning certain types of gun equipment, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) wants to draw attention to and thank the president for proposed measures to create safe school environments that are free from bullying and harassment.

As reported in [The Huffington Post](#), the accused shooter at California's Taft Union High School may have targeted children he perceived as bullies. This tragedy provides a clear example that any serious discussion of school violence prevention must consider the climate in schools, including eradicating bullying and harassment and properly training school professionals and bystander students. We need to figure out how to get our kids to talk to us so that they can get the help they need.

AAUW's report [Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School](#) shows that our country is dealing with a pervasive problem: Nearly half of all 7-12th grade students said that they have encountered some form of sexual harassment and that this harassment caused them to feel sick to their stomach, have trouble sleeping, and skip school. As we know, harassment can lead to disastrous outcomes, especially for students who are targeted for failing to conform to gender stereotypes, which is often the case for [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students](#) who report sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment in middle and high schools is rarely reported; only about 9 percent of harassed students reported the incident, according to AAUW research. Serious questions remain about how well our society is providing a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

Harassment and bullying are cyclical. Harassers and bullies have often been harassed or bullied themselves. According to the 2004 [Safe School Initiative report](#), almost three-quarters of those who committed school violence felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others before doing so. *Crossing the Line* found similar results among students who sexually harass other students. In extreme cases, like the Taft shooting, the experience of being bullied appeared to have been a

factor in the decision to attack the school. A safe and supportive school culture and climate is critical to avoiding violence at school. The president's proposal would provide much-needed resources to schools so they are better equipped to prevent severe violence.

Congress needs to act now to create safer school climates by providing resources to help local school districts hire resource officers and mental health professionals and invest in safety.

Furthermore, Congress should enact legislation similar to the Safe Schools Improvement Act and the [Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students Act](#) -- introduced in the last Congress and likely to be reintroduced soon -- which support proven strategies to reduce bullying, drug abuse, violence, and other problem behaviors.

Our nation's schools should be the safest places possible for children. We're glad the White House is tackling the role that bullying and harassment play in school violence, and we look forward to supporting initiatives that protect all students.

- [www.huffingtonpost.com/linda-hallman/tackling-the-role-that-bu\\_b\\_2593740.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/linda-hallman/tackling-the-role-that-bu_b_2593740.html)