

## *Legislation introduced to criminalize bullying*

State Senator Sandra Williams (D-Cleveland) recently provided sponsor testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on legislation she introduced to reduce incidents of bullying by making it a criminal offense.

“The purpose of this bill is not to criminalize individuals but to form a deterrent and make sure they understand the seriousness of bullying and that the consequences should in fact be as serious as the effects,” she testified.

According to Williams, 21 percent of Ohio students have been bullied at school in the past year, and an additional 14 percent have been bullied outside of school, including electronically.

“Bullying has quickly become an epidemic in Ohio that negatively impacts not only children, but parents, teachers and the community,” she said. “Bullying has serious adverse educational effects and students who are targets often experience extreme stress that leads to physical illness, reduced ability to learn, increased absenteeism and decreased test scores. Bullying often results in violent behavior, retaliation against the offender, harm to innocent bystanders and suicide.”

Williams introduced the legislation after hearing from concerned constituents. In meetings with school officials, she was told that changes to state law are necessary to adequately address the problem.

