

Please Support and Co-Sponsor the Bills H.1525 and S.1007: AN ACT TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO BULLYING OF ELDERLY & DISABLED RESIDENTS

Rep. Kevin Honan has refiled H.1525, ***“An Act to prevent and respond to bullying of elderly and disabled residents.”*** Sen. Joan Lovely has refiled S.1007 in the Senate. **We seek your co-sponsorship and support for these bills in this session.**

In 2017, Governor Baker appointed a Commission to Study Ways to Prevent Bullying in Subsidized Public and Assisted Multifamily Housing. The Commission’s Working Group on Best Practices and legislation developed this comprehensive legislation with input from many advocates, constituency representatives, agency and legislative representatives, over several months. ***This is the consensus text endorsed by the Commission in December 2017, included in the Final Report to the Governor.***

Why do we need this legislation?

- “Bullying” is the intentional, aggressive & often repeated behavior by one or more persons to impose wrongful, harmful control over another. Bullying tactics can be verbal, social or physical including gossip and actions that disrespect and devalue the other.
- Social bullying is commonplace among older adults in independent senior housing. The Governor’s Commission conducted the first survey in any state to measure the prevalence and impact of bullying in public/subsidized multifamily housing, with a focus on senior/disabled communities. **Nearly half the 637 respondents directly experienced bullying, more than half witnessed it and over 60% of management staff stated they had received a resident complaint.**
- There is a cost to social bullying. Social bullying can have many serious consequences, including **reduced self-esteem; feelings of rejection, depression and suicidal ideation; decreased ability to manage daily activities; and social isolation that can adversely impact health and well-being** (Bonifas & Frankel, 2012). Older adults may become less willing to participate in activities and withdraw socially. It results in staff burnout and turnover, erodes community cohesiveness, and puts tenancy at risk for those who bully, those who are their victims, and other community members.
- While the Commonwealth does have statutes that provide potential remedies, few are aware of where to turn for help or what their legal rights are. ***The Final Commission Report underscored the need for education, training and resources for residents and management alike, including the need for a reporting mechanism outside the housing development.***

What this bill does:

Modeled on legislation to address bullying in public schools, H.1525/S.1007 defines and prohibits “bullying”, “social bullying” and “mobbing” within Public or Subsidized Multifamily Housing for seniors (55+) and people with disabilities. The bill requires property owners/managers to develop a building-specific plan to prevent and remedy bullying; train residents and building staff; and address victims’ rights to seek relief and enforcement. It would require the Attorney General’s Civil Rights Division to develop a Model Prevention and Remediation Plan and Training Curriculum for owners to adapt within one year, and for owners/managers to adopt a building-specific plan within six months of the Model Plan.

The bill requires the AG’s Civil Rights Division to issue rules and regulations for owners/managers to implement these plans and notify residents. Management staff are required to investigate and remediate incidents, including notification of local law enforcement where appropriate. The bill also ensures that victim/residents can confidentially report to the AG incidents where owner/manager staff are the alleged perpetrators. The Division would also be tasked with bi-annual Surveys and updates.

Voices of Constituents

"I set my alarm for midnight so I can get my mail in peace, without the fear that I will be humiliated by the group of residents that sit in the lobby all day making mean and nasty comments" - Mr. P, Western MA

"I barely go out any more for fear that Mr. X will follow me, block my path and sexually harass me. Staff don't believe me and it has gotten so bad that the only time I go out is to do my laundry at 4 am, when Mr. X won't be around. I would like to move out but I have nowhere else to go. I am anxious, depressed and I have even thought of killing myself".
- Ms. T, Southern MA

"The group of women that hang out by the smoking area make 'oinking' noises when my daughter comes to pick me up, so now I ask her to meet me 2 blocks away to avoid the embarrassment" - Mrs. B, Northshore MA

"I used to eat in the lunch room 5 years ago when I came in. But in the last 2-3 years, I eat alone in my apartment."
- Mrs. W, Metrowest Boston MA

Other examples provided from a local housing authority:

Example #1: The resident has insulted her neighbors, telling one resident that she should go back to the country that she came from.

Example #2: Resident volunteers help each week to distribute surplus food from a local food coop to residents in their senior building. The food distribution occurs on weekends, so there is no HA staff to observe what goes on. There have been repeated complaints from residents that they are sent to the end of the line if they do not make the "suggested" \$2 donation to the food coop. Some complain that better quality food is reserved for the volunteers' friends. Some residents say that they no longer go to the food program because they feel intimidated.

Thank you for your support! If you have follow-up questions, please contact:

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