

Senate Human Services Committee
Testimony of Patricia A. Leno, District 30
Regarding: HB 1362
March 13, 2023

This bill is a timely one to address the issue of empowering parents when we are seeing parental concerns in public school board meetings being diminished and ignored. When a parent comes to a board meeting with concerns and may seem angry, their concerns still need to be valued. In some cases parents' viewpoints and concerns are not being considered by a school board.

An example of this is recently, in the state of Georgia, a parent took on an issue at a school board meeting which lead eventually to a lawsuit. All the parent wanted to do is to present their concerns about the type of literature available to their child. This parent was reading a book from their child's school library, and her reading this book was stopped by the school board because profanity wasn't allowed in school board meetings! Apparently, because this issue wasn't addressed by this school board, she came back, reading these profane books again, which lead to her removal from participating in the meetings. Other moms were finding the same type of books in their school districts nearby, so these moms formed a group called "Mama Bears." Two moms eventually filed a lawsuit concerning their freedom of speech being denied, and they won \$107,500 of their legal fees to be paid, along with a nominal damage of under \$18.00, and these explicit books were removed from the library. So it wasn't about the money. These parents just wanted to be heard.

Isn't it a parents' job to protect their children and the elected school board's job to respond to the parents' concerns? Apparently not in this case. To me, it would've been really simple to take care of this problem. If the book is so very graphic and shocking, simply stop the parent from reading it, express your concern, ask if you can look at the book later, and meet with her. Of course, common sense would be to go to the library and check the collection of these types of books and have them removed. So, did the school board think this parent's concerns were valuable? NO! Then, that is a really big problem.

When a parent is viewed as more knowledgeable about their child and knowing what is best for them by a teacher, administrator, or a school board, this builds bridges to ensure the school and parent will work together to provide the best opportunities for the parents' child. This is very valuable and constructive. Seeing a parent as a problem and not valuing their opinions and concerns is dangerous. School boards are made of people with many different viewpoints. Not everyone has the same values. Nevertheless, parents are the primary stakeholders, and should be valued for their input into the education of their child.

We need to pass HB1362 to make sure this type of school board action against parents doesn't happen here. Thank you for listening.

Resources: ABC6OnYourSide.com Article: "Georgia school district forced to pay more than 100K after censoring parents at board meeting" by Kristina Wotrobski, February 23, 2023

Forsythnews.com Article: "School district reaches settlement with Mama Bears in free speech lawsuit." By Sabrina Kerns January, 13, 2023

