

Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force Hearing held Thursday, November 14th, 2013

Opening Remarks

Hearing called to order at 1:15 p.m.

Steven Isoye, Ph.D.
Superintendent for Oak Park River Forest High School
District 200

Good Afternoon everybody my name is Steven Isoye and I am the Superintendent at Oak Park River Forest High School District 200 and on behalf of District 200 we are very pleased to be hosting this hearing in regards to the domestic violence task force, a very important topic that we should be talking about throughout this state. I am really glad to see that this Task Force has been taken by our Representative that's here today, and also by Senator Don Harmon

I think that the words we will hear today will help the public understand the need for this type of work.

Today we have with us State Representative Camille Lilly, Co-Chair, Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force. We also have Chris Ptak, who is the Prevention Program Director of Sarah's Inn, Co-chair, Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force, and the Honorable Dorothy Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court in Cook County who is the administrator in charge of all of the work and who has been shepherding along all of the things that need be put into place. And to her staff who is here today to help us in order to host this event for you today. State Senator Don Harmon is the Chief Senate Sponsor, he has Eileen Lynch in the audience today, she is his District Director, if at any point anyone has questions, she can carry them along to the Senator.

State Representative Camille Lilly:

I am excited to partner with Dorothy Brown, Senator Harmon and Oak Park River Forest Step Back Program to hear more about domestic violence. I was honored to sponsor House Bill 5689, which began a year ago. We put in place a Task Force to look at this issue and the goal is to Eradicate Domestic Violence and to me that means to end it, that means collectively address the issues related to domestic violence so that we can stop violence in our communities, in our families and in our households.

I am honored to be a part and a partner in making sure that we are collectively working on this issue and I'm very honored to have such talented people, compassionate leaders, youth and parents to be a part of this process.

I am here to listen and to learn, and I am hoping that you all are here to do the same.

Chris Ptak, Prevention Program Director of Sarah's Inn, Co-chair, Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force

Our goal today is to hear testimony that celebrates the Step Back program and the students here today and those that have participated in the past four years. We also want to celebrate the teachers and the administration that supported it.

In addition, we will be introduced to a program that can be used as a model for successful violence prevention across the state of Illinois. To do that we will here from not only experts in social work and administration and public policy, we are going to hear from students who have gone through the program themselves and how and why it has been useful and helpful in their lives. We will hear from teachers who have been through the program and their experience both as an administrator and being in relationship with the students and experienced first-hand the impact their lives, and from the parents of the impact from a program like this.

Testimony of: Linda Carlson
Teacher of Girls “Step Back” Program
Oak Park and River Forest High School

Teacher Perspective of Girls “Step Back” Program

Quiet, alert and with apprehension, thirty-six freshmen girls walk into their first Physical Education class of high school. They are overwhelmed navigating the building on their first day of school, maneuvering the crowded hallways, and are driving on high gear trying to figure out where they fit into the all-important social hierarchy. There is also great excitement – new friends, potential romances, dances to attend, sports to play, clubs to join, and memories of a lifetime to be made. Oh yes, and they must balance this while maintaining their academics. Their excitement and apprehension is palpable as I begin to introduce their PE class – Girls Step Back...a RADical self-defense class that goes beyond the physical by exploring how to defend the emotional and mental well-being of teenage girls.

As we explore the Step Back curriculum, I’m humbled as these young girls begin peeling back the layers of their 13-year-old selves. They begin to share and relate to each other as they discover they are more similar in experience than different. One by one girls reveal their struggles and victories of wrestling with living in a rape culture – a world that victim blaming and sexual objectification of women is the unconscious beat to which most of the world moves. It’s all too evident that the result is young girls not KNOWING TO THE CORE that HER VOICE is VALUABLE and is a powerful personal weapon. Many also struggle with understanding THEIR BODIES – that it BELONGS TO THEM... and no one else.

I’m saddened to know that as these freshmen girls are trying to navigate high school, many of them are ALREADY carrying heavy stories. There are SURVIVORS IN THE ROOM. There are victims of sexual violence and/or physical violence at the hands of family, housemates, dating partners, a trusted person or a stranger. I understood that statistically I’d have survivors BUT it’s overwhelming when a statistic is a young teenage girl standing before me. These girls should be busy worrying about homecoming, the next test, or feeding their pets. However, steeped in reality, we must press forward. These girls need US!

Out of this need, a comprehensive 45 day course was developed with my passionate colleagues. In 1985, Marcia Hurt introduced women’s self-defense in the Physical Education department at

OPRFHS. When I was hired in 1994, I joined Marcia in teaching a comprehensive curriculum including: bullying, healthy dating relationships, dating violence and sexual assault.

The course has evolved into a required course for all freshmen girls. I believe the success is steeped not only in the need for this class, but the relationships that instructors build with their students. Due to the well-developed curriculum, new teachers are able to take the content and begin by building a safe space in their classrooms to create an ideal learning environment. It also sets the stage for many girls to confide in a trusted adult in the building to get the help she needs. I'm amazed by the impact step back instructors have on girls at OPRFHS.

It's a privilege to empower our young women, to help them heal, to keep them safe and aide them in growing into warriors.

Testimony of: Leonard Ingram, PhD
President/Founder
The Chicago Anger Institute/House of Ra Mentoring Program

The role that mis-managed anger (rage) plays as the underlying factor fueling the majority of incidents of Domestic Violence across the entire spectrum of human relationships and the need to make anger management and conflict resolution training/skills an integral part of public education as a means of wide-spread intervention of future episodes of domestic violence in people adult relationships, workplace and community. The need, I submit, is most urgent.

Testimony of: Janel Bishop
Student Intervention Director
Oak Park and River Forest High School

I am Janel Bishop, a Student Intervention Director/Dean of Students here at Oak Park and River Forest High School. I have had the pleasure of experiencing the direct impact of the Self-Defense/Step Back program here at our school. I have been a guest speaker of the Self-Defense portion of the program for the last few years.

During these occasions I have spoken to the young women about my role here in the building as an advocate for them, about where to go when they don't feel emotionally or physically safe, and about how the school responds to bullying and harassment.

This program thoroughly covers self-esteem awareness, bullying, healthy relationships, dating violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, coping mechanisms, among other topics. This program educates and builds awareness about these topics in a way that is not done through any other curriculum in our building, to my knowledge.

If we did not have such a program, I would be very concerned that our students would not have the exposure they need to this information in order to be well-informed young people, able to identify when something is not right in their peer relationships and feel empowered enough to speak up about it and know who to go to when they need help.

The program has a direct impact on the work that I do because students, after being exposed to the information, are more knowledgeable and feel encouraged to report incidents that they previously either didn't realize should or could be reported or didn't feel courageous enough to do so.

The impact has been so immediate that students have often come up to their teachers or to another adult they trusted at the end of a particular session to report that they have been bullied or are in an unhealthy relationship.

We have even had a number of students come to report something about a friend of theirs. This makes such a difference in the work that I do because so many incidents go unreported which results in many students suffering alone.

Receiving the information directly from victims or their friends allows me to proceed in my work to help put a stop to whatever is happening to them and provide them with the support they need.

This is definitely a curriculum that all high schools should have access to because as educators, we owe it to our students to educate them not only about what is in their textbooks but also about how to live a safe, healthy emotional life as a teen, equipping them with skills they will use for a lifetime.

We often speak of those lifetime skills we want students to have when it comes to being able to read and write and make informed decisions and be productive contributors to society.

But, how can our young people really contribute to society at their fullest potential if they are not also emotionally healthy?

This program increases the chances of having more students who are not only academically prepared but emotionally prepared for real world as well.

Thank you.

**Testimony of: Charlie Stoops, Dean
Graduate School of Social Work
Dominican University
& Co-founder
Center for Advancing Domestic Peace**

I want to thank the Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force for this opportunity to testify on a topic I have spent the majority of my social work career addressing – The eradication of domestic violence. In 1993, I was trained at Sarah's Inn here in Oak Park to provide intervention services to men who use violence in intimate partner relationships.

Over the 20 years since then, I have been involved in direct service delivery, the development of state standards for Partner Abuse Intervention Programs, and co-founded the Center for

Advancing Domestic Peace, a community-based provider of domestic violence intervention services.

I have also collaborated in the development of a comprehensive bio psychosocial assessment for men who batter for the Cook County Social Services Department and in research on the effectiveness of intervention programs for men who batter in Cook County.

What I can tell you from my years of experience is that our interventions post arrest for abusive & violent behaviors will never eradicate domestic violence or even significantly reduce its devastating impact on the victims, their families and our communities.

What I do believe is that school based violence prevention programs, like the Step Back Violence Prevention Program developed by Sarah's Inn, are essential to the eradication of domestic violence and other forms of aggressive and violent behaviors.

Adults who have completed their mandated services at the Center for Advancing Domestic Peace have consistently said in exit and research interviews that they needed a program that addressed how to have healthy nonviolent relationships when they were younger.

As preliminary evaluation data on the Step Back Program shows, a comprehensive prevention program that is required of ALL students – young men and women - reduces incidents of all forms of violent and disruptive behavior within the school – namely it fosters not only individual change but a cultural shift within the institution.

In my role as a social work educator and administrator, I believe that the guidance of PhD trained social work practitioners, like those in the Graduate School of Social Work at Dominican University, are a crucial component for “scaling up” a local program designed for a particular school context to one adaptable to varying contexts throughout Illinois. This will assure the fidelity of program implementation and subsequent reduction in violent and abusive behaviors desired.

With access to academic databases, a graduate school of social work faculty can assist in assuring that the prevention program is theoretically grounded, methodologically sound, and evidence driven. With years of teaching and training experience, social work faculty can assist both in developing and delivering effective training programs for the local school prevention teams.

During implementation, social work faculty can provide technical support and guidance. And certainly critical, a PhD trained social work faculty can develop the sophisticated program evaluation components needed to assess the effectiveness of the multiple components of a multisite prevention program.

This would include process and outcome evaluations at a student, administrative and school-wide level with ability to combine results regionally and state-wide.

With coordination of other PhD level faculty in other graduate and undergraduate programs like Education, Library and Information Science, Sociology, Criminology and Psychology, the

quality of a sophisticated statewide prevention program can be assured and the potential for the reductions in violent and abusive behavior sought will be more likely assured. Thank You

Testimony of: Charity Strong
Student perspective of Self-Defense/Step Back

In self-defense class, I was able to express myself in a way I didn't feel empowered to at first. I feel more comfortable showing you how I expressed myself through this poem.

Her uterus carried a blessing
Wedlock
A mistake
He tucked her face
Clawed her shell
And stoned her heart
Her blood was watery
Licked the tips of her previous scars
Left them wet
With ripe red droplets
She just wanted the clench of his fist to ease away
He made dingy blemishes through her skin
Carved a pattern in her skull
As he hauled her edged twists out
Tampered her body
A Flawless flow of her blood gushed down
He was her companion, lover, soul mate
Made her form glass tears
Cutting the skin on her face
He cheered, "I hope it's dead too"
Cursed that night with darkness
He killed her blessing
Murder.

This class taught me that no matter what, it's not my, or my friends, fault, that whatever happened, happened. It taught me how to help other girls when things like this happen. Self Defense is a way many girls can speak and actually be listened to because no one is judging you.

Testimony of Rahasad Singletary
Physical Education Teacher
Oak Park and River Forest High School

Apprehensive and curious teenager boys from all walks of life crowd into a room excited to begin their first year of physical education in high school. "Can we play basketball?" "Why are we meeting in this classroom?" or "Is this an all boy's class?" are just a few of the questions that come my way as the bell has rung to start class. Knowing the truth to all these questions and the

reactions that I will get once they are answered I calmly reply “no there will not be any basketball this quarter, this classroom is where you will spend six of the nine weeks of the class and yes these are all your brothers for the first semester no girls. Now slightly confused and even more curious on what course they have been enrolled into, we all begin to explore Step Back.

Year after year that I have taught this course of self-defense it never changes that these young 13 and 14 year old boys are only aware of one way of defending themselves. In this hyper masculine culture, full of gender roles and stereotypes, these young men, for the most part, only see, hear and read about men being physical and not displaying emotion unless it is anger. The students one after the other recite the same answers each class as we fill out our trap in the box activity, where the boys explain how they think U.S. culture expects them to behave. It is an eye opening experience not only the students but me as well as the students begin to realize how impossible it is to conform or submit to all these roles and stereotypes. This activity is just the icebreaker into what we dive into as we break down the mental, physical and emotion ways of defending oneself.

Through this course I have built some great relationships with my students as they share their personal experiences with me. Building a rapport with my students is a must in this course so that they feel comfortable sharing these experiences. Being able to see my students in the hallway each day and saying “what’s up” “how’s life” or giving a high five creates an environment of trust and likeness between me and my students. Creating that element of trust goes a long way in the students opening up more in their journals and more importantly in classroom discussions. Watching the develop of the students themselves and their confidence becomes more and more evident as students begin to back each other up and open up about things that previously they would keep to themselves in fear of how they would be perceived.

Creating this foundation with our freshmen boys creates a better environment not only in the classroom, but in the school and also in the student’s lives as well.

Testimony of Siobhan Doherty

OPRF Student

Perspective of self-defense student:

Hello, and good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, today I will be telling you a little bit about my experience in self-defense. Self-defense was my favorite gym class I have taken, and definitely the most useful and rewarding.

In the class you learn many techniques for defending yourself, but also how to avoid a physical confrontation altogether. Not only do I feel safer walking home from friends’ houses when it’s dark but the emotional side of the class was worthwhile as well.

The first few days everyone was a bit shy and only a couple people opened up during the discussions, but with the help of the teacher and as time went on everyone in the class got to be really comfortable with each other and very trusting.

The bonds I have with the teacher and the girls that were in that class are still just as strong today as they were during the semester. I personally got a lot out of the class especially when we were talking about self-image and self-confidence.

Last year I was struggling a lot with depression which, as a teenage girl only makes your body image worse. With the help of the class I was able to talk about it and get help without feeling awkward or helpless, but rather I felt better about myself and was comfortable enough with the issue to say, “wow, maybe I do need a little help with this.”

The class is very confidential, but also stresses that there is nothing wrong with needing help, and gives plenty of outlets to get that help. I know of at least three other of my friends who had issues with either an unhealthy relationship, or difficulty coping with something that happened in the past that also found comfort, advice, and closure through the help of the Self-defense course.

Another topic we talked a lot about was domestic abuse. Abuse isn't limited to just physical or verbal abuse. It can be emotional, and can be much more subtle than you think. The class opened my eyes to a lot of things that have happened to me or my friends that if they were to have continued would have been counted as abuse and I found it really shocking how common and un-talked about these things were. Self-defense also talked about some of the things that sex ed. didn't go into detail with, like the emotional side of having a sexual relationship with someone. I feel much more prepared for these experiences with another adult to talk to as well as more information under my belt.

Self-defense was a very self-empowering class which is great because a lot of things that get taught to women and girls are that they need a man to come save them, which is quite false actually and this class did a really good job of stressing the importance of taking care of yourself and not having guilt about terminating a toxic relationship whether it be with a friend or romantic interest. You don't owe anybody an explanation for taking care of your own well-being and that point was really brought home during the class, which I really appreciated because it's nice to hear someone tell you that you as an individual are important and special and worth taking care of.

I highly recommend that this class get listed as an option in other schools because it would be amazing to have more girls have these skills and thoughts about themselves outside of just OPRF. As well as being useful, this class was also pretty fun, and I think many other young women would enjoy it as well. Thank you for your time, and enjoy the rest of your afternoon.

Oak Park and River Forest High School Step Back Program

Testimony of: Clay Reagan

Division Head-Physical Education/Driver Education

Testimony regarding Oak Park and River Forest Step Back Program

In an age where bullying, aggression and sexual violence are an everyday appearance on the news this class is a must for all school districts throughout the state.

Our step back program concentrates on truly serving our students at OPRF. Our curriculum is a continually evolving curriculum based on the needs of our students and the changing events in our community.

We are not naïve to think Oak Park and River Forest students share the same needs as other students in towns throughout the state.

We also know that from class to class the needs may be different. Our teachers have worked to create curriculum and resources that can adapt to the needs of our specific students and classes. That is part of what makes our program so successful.

The second piece is our teachers. Our teachers have taken great pride in our step back program and are continually looking at education's best practices to shape our program. Teachers are excited to collaborate and discuss their classes each day.

Our new teachers are eager to get involved. The curriculum that has been created allows us to bring new teachers in and plug them right into the class. Adding new teachers also adds new perspectives and experiences. As OPRF moves forward all of our new teachers will be asked to take on at least one section of this class. This is a great way for them to truly understand our students, school and community.

I have talked about our program and our teachers; now let me talk about what I do. Well, it's simple, SUPPORT. I provide support to our teachers in the form of gathering resources, providing them time to collaborate and listening to their ideas, concerns and beliefs. Quality teachers make this program fly, just as any program in any school.

As the Division Head my job is easy when it comes to our step back program. I make sure positive, quality teachers are teaching the class and provide those teachers with the necessary resources to accompany their teaching.

**Testimony of Yesenia Maldonado, LCSW, ICDVP
(Illinois Certified Domestic Violence Professional)
Director of Programs "Between Friends"**

Thank you for the opportunity to join this discussion. I come to you from the audience listening to all of the wonderful work happening at Oak Park River Forest High School, I come as a mother of a preteen son and a teenager daughter and as a professional with 20 years of experience providing prevention programming in Illinois.

As Chris mentioned, I am the Director of Programs at Between Friends an organization dedicated to building a community without domestic violence. I appreciate how this effort embodies the importance of building the core elements of a community without domestic

violence by engaging teachers, students, school personnel, with professionals in the community to provide a comprehensive approach to prevention work in IL.

Since 1995, Between Friends has operated its REACH or Relationship Education a Choice for Hope teen dating violence prevention program. This program has worked with over 77,000 students, teachers, and parents.

What we know is that we need a community and multi-faceted approach for prevention work to be successful. Matching the needs of a school with a prevention program that follows core elements is essential to this process.

I am sure the Step Up program meets some or if all of these core elements or standards, but so do other programs within the Illinois. I am part of the program development committee and building this framework is what we hope to provide.

We live in a state that is mandating our schools to provide programming to teachers and our students in grades 7-12 on teen dating violence prevention.

What we have heard today is a high school version of this work and that our young people are already experiencing these types of relationships.

We need to find out about building a framework where we explore what is happening across this state and match up effective programming with schools and not rest in thinking one program or delivery method is the only one to base our framework for the state.

**Testimony of Jeff Aranowski
Illinois State Board of Education
Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force**

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) was asked to provide testimony to the Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force (the “Task Force”) with respect to existing peer-to-peer violence prevention requirements for Illinois public schools.

This testimony will focus on those items that are explicitly required in law or administrative regulations. Non-binding and/or optional programs or initiatives are not included as part of this testimony.

The Task Force should be advised that the following list of requirements may not be exhaustive.
A. Policy on Teen Dating Violence [105 ILCS 110/3.10]. Districts must adopt a policy on teen dating violence that:

1. States that teen dating violence is unacceptable and prohibited and that each student has the right to a safe learning environment.
2. Incorporates age-appropriate education about teen dating violence in new or existing training programs for students in grades 7 through 12 and school employees.

3. Establishes procedures for the manner in which employees of a school are to respond to incidents of teen dating violence that take place at the school, on school grounds, at school-sponsored activities, or in vehicles used for school-provided transportation.

4. Identifies by job title the school officials who are responsible for receiving reports related to teen dating violence.

5. Notifies students and parents of the teen dating violence policy adopted by the board.

B. Sexual Abuse/Assault Awareness [105 ILCS 110/3]. Age-appropriate sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention education is required in grades pre-kindergarten through 12.

C. Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution [105 ILCS 5/27-23.4]. School districts shall provide instruction in violence prevention and conflict resolution education for grades kindergarten through 12 and may include such instruction in the courses of study regularly taught therein. School districts may give regular school credit for satisfactory completion by the student of such courses. Such instruction must include:

1. The consequences of violent behavior.

2. The causes of violent reactions to conflict.

3. Nonviolent conflict resolution techniques.

4. The relationship between drugs, alcohol and violence.

This curriculum requirement is applicable only if funded sufficiently through private or federal funds. Funds are not available and, hence, this provision is not currently being monitored for compliance.

D. Sexual Intimidation and Harassment [23 IAC 200.50 (f)]. No student shall be subjected to sexual intimidation or harassment by any school employee, by other students, or by the effect of any school policy or practice.

E. Bullying Prevention [105 ILCS 5/27-23.7]. Each district must adopt a bullying policy that is communicated annually to parents and students, and is updated every two (2) years. Such updates must be filed with the Illinois State Board of Education. "Bullying" means any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

1. Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;
2. Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;
3. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; or
4. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

F. ROE Teacher Institutes [105 ILCS 5/3-11]. Teachers institutes shall include teacher training committed to (i) peer counseling programs and other anti-violence and conflict resolution programs, including without limitation programs for preventing at risk students from committing violent acts.

G. Warning Signs of Suicidal Behavior [105 ILCS 5/10-22.39 (b)]. In addition to other topics at in-service training programs, school guidance counselors, teachers, school social workers, and other school personnel who work with pupils in grades 7 through 12 shall be trained to identify the warning signs of mental illness and suicidal behavior in adolescents and teens and shall be taught appropriate intervention and referral techniques.

H. Domestic and Sexual Violence In-Service [105 ILCS 5/10-22.39 (d)]. At least once every 2 years, an in-service training program for school personnel who work with pupils must be conducted by persons with expertise in domestic and sexual violence and the needs of expectant and parenting youth and shall include training concerning (i) communicating with and listening to youth victims of domestic or sexual violence and expectant and parenting youth, (ii) connecting youth victims of domestic or sexual violence and expectant and parenting youth to appropriate in-school services and other agencies, programs, and services as needed, and (iii) implementing the school district's policies, procedures, and protocols with regard to such youth, including confidentiality. At a minimum, school personnel must be trained to understand,

provide information and referrals, and address issues pertaining to youth who are parents, expectant parents, or victims of domestic or sexual violence.

I. Chicago Public Schools Violence Prevention Hotline [105 ILCS 5/34-21.8]. Must be answered, monitored and staffed by the Chicago Police Department. The purpose of the hot line is to allow for anonymous calls to help prevent violence.

J. School Counseling Services [105 ILCS 5/10-22.24b]. School counseling services in the public schools may be provided by school counselors as defined in Section 10-22.24a. School counseling services include but are not limited to: (1) educational planning; (2) career development and counseling; (3) college counseling; (4) developing and facilitating anti-violence education or conflict resolution programs, or both; (5) providing crisis intervention programs within the school setting; (6) making appropriate referrals to outside agencies; (7) interpreting achievement, career, and vocational test information; (8) developing individual career plans for all students; (9) providing individual and small group counseling; (10) addressing the developmental needs of students by designing curricula for classroom counseling and guidance; (11) consulting and counseling with parents for the academic, career, and personal success of their children; (12) facilitating school to work transition programs; and (13) supervising school counseling interns enrolled in school counseling programs that meet the standards of the State Board of Education. Nothing in this Section prohibits other qualified professionals, including other certificated school personnel, from providing those services listed in this Section.

K. School Psychological Services [105 ILCS 5/14-9.01.1]. In the public schools, school psychological services provided by qualified specialists who hold Type 73 School Service Personnel Certificates endorsed for school psychology issued by the State Teacher Certification Board may include, but are not limited to: (i) administration and interpretation of psychological and educational evaluations; (ii) developing school-based prevention programs, including violence prevention programs; (iii) counseling with students, parents, and teachers on educational and mental health issues; (iv) acting as liaisons between public schools and community agencies; (v) evaluating program effectiveness; (vi) providing crisis intervention within the school setting; (vii) helping teachers, parents, and others involved in the educational process to provide optimum teaching and learning conditions for all students; (viii) supervising school psychologist interns enrolled in school psychology programs that meet the standards established by the State Board of Education; and (ix) screening of school enrollments to identify children who should be referred for individual study. Nothing in this Section prohibits other qualified professionals from providing those services listed for which they are appropriately trained.

L. School Social Work Services [105 ILCS 5/14-9.01.2]. School social work services may include, among other items: developing and implementing school-based prevention programs, including mediation and violence prevention, implementing social and emotional education programs and services, and establishing and implementing bullying prevention and intervention programs.

The extent to which any of the aforementioned provisions may apply to a particular district or school depends upon a number of factors. Further, districts and schools may meet relevant provisions in a number of ways and through a variety of resources.

We thank you for allowing ISBE to participate in this hearing and in the Task Force's work. We value the core mission of the group and appreciate the work you have before you. We welcome any questions, comments or recommendations. Contact information for relevant ISBE personnel is listed below.

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Testimony of: Chris Ledbetter
Teacher, Oak Park and River Forest High School

My name is Chris Ledbetter and I am a teacher in the Physical Education Division at Oak Park River Forest High School. I have had the pleasure of teaching the "Step Back" class as part of the freshmen curriculum for the past few years. I have been involved with the step back program since its inception and was involved in discussions and meetings on the development of the curriculum. The first two years that the class was offered at the high school, I taught the class with Chris Ptak. Chris is an employee of Sarah's Inn here in Oak Park and was the driving force behind the curriculum development that is currently in place. I started teaching the class without Chris last year and most recently had three sections of self-defense (Step Back) that I taught daily.

The self-defense class that is offered here at the high school has been a highly rewarding class for me to teach. I find that I am challenged daily by my students to come up with the most creative and interesting ways to deliver the material that is being presented. While I taught this class alone on a daily basis, I often relied on experts to guide my instruction and delivery of information to my students. The class offers students a unique opportunity to be exposed to

information that is not currently a part of most comprehensive high school curriculums. The topics presented in the self-defense class are:

- Identifying dangerous male stereotypes
- Gender roles
- Dating violence
- Bullying
- Unhealthy dating relationships
- Sexual and Domestic Violence

As a teacher and a coach for the past 17 years, I feel that a comprehensive Violence reduction class is a necessity in any high school setting. The topics that are presented and covered in this class are things that each and every high school student has either encountered or has expressed that they know someone currently experiencing them.

Teenage bullying, dating violence, and identifying with dangerous male stereotypes are common place in all high schools both locally and nationally. There is countless documentation to support my position that violence prevention is something that is often overlooked when determining the social and emotional needs of high school aged children. The reality is that teenagers are facing the same problems at the high school level no matter the demographics of the particular student body where they are enrolled.

The need for the class is something that I feel very strongly about, but the manner in which the class is taught daily by the teachers at the particular high school where the class is offered. I am fully supportive of a collaborative effort on the part of the school and private agencies, but feel the class should be directed by the teachers. I have seen firsthand how the positive relationships between the teacher and students have allowed this class to succeed at OPRFHS.

The cornerstone of the program's success will be in the environment in which it is taught. Students, who feel comfortable with the teacher, trust the confidentiality of the group will be much more open to class discussions that address the real problems that these students are experiencing.

Testimony of: Jeremy Gaines
Student, Oak Park and River Forest High School

In this step back class I was enrolled in we learned about various topics, such as bullying, dangerous male stereotypes, and unhealthy relationships.

These are just some of the things that I found useful in everyday life that I learned in class. A big part of this class was bullying and identifying when it is happening.

Bullying has been happening a lot more often in high school and aggressive behavior is starting to result more from bullying occurring. We spent a lot of time learning to identify when it is happening and what to do when we see it.

Also, we learned the basics of self-defense; I found this to be very useful. When a kid has been bullied for a long period of time, and it escalates to physical contact, step back is a great thing to learn when trying to just defend yourself.

We watched a video in class one day, where a man who was an average male was approached by another male in an aggressive manner, and the man who was being approached used simple self defense mechanisms to defend himself.

These are the same self defense mechanisms that we learned in the step back class. Step back is used only for self-defense, and is not intended to harm anyone, only to defend yourself. Step back is a great way to defend yourself without severely harming the offender.

This class does not just teach you how to react when you are being bullied; it teaches you how to help other kids when they are being bullied as well. And that is why I value this class so much. This step back class is overall a great class and taught me a lot of life lessons that I use today.

Testimony of: Rachael Telleen
Parent, Oak Park and River Forest High School

I am the mother of a sophomore daughter attending OPRFS. Last year she participated in the Self-Defense class and I have only positive things to share about it. My daughter has struggled with depression for a large part of her young life. This was her first opportunity in a school setting to hear that other girls her own age do not have lives as perfect as she had imagined. Yes – she loved learning how to defend herself and practicing her newly developed skills on the policeman. This part of the class definitely helped her feel empowered - knowing she has the skills to defend herself if necessary.

However being able to talking openly and in a supportive environment about eating disorders, depression, self-harming behaviors was probably the most beneficial experience for her. My daughter was surprised to hear that “popular” girls have experienced their own difficulties. Her teacher provided an environment that allowed the girls to share their experiences in an open and honest way, without being concerned that girls would make fun of her for what she had shared.

While developing math and English skills are important, it is also important for our kids to develop self-esteem and confidence if they are to succeed in life. Many girls struggle with this, and as a parent, I would like to see this be included as a part of the school curriculum.

As a parent I do everything I can to build my children's confidence and self-esteem, however, I am their mom. Of course I'm going to think they are great!

But hearing feedback from peers is just as critical. Hearing that other kids face problems in our school and across the country, knowing they are not alone can make a huge difference. If a program in the school can support and encourage this development, I am 100% in support.

I can't tell you how many times my daughter came home from school to share what they had done or talked about in class that day. While she doesn't dislike any of her classed, I can't say that she is eager to give me an update like she did in this class.

Last week I happened to get together with a group of mom's that formed when our daughters were Daisy's in girl scouts. I asked them if their daughters had has a positive experience in the class like mine. Overwhelmingly the response was yes.

I would strongly encourage you to make it possible for all kids to benefit from this fabulous curriculum.

**Testimony of: Amy Abbott Pappageorge
Parent, Oak Park and River Forest High School**

I am deeply indebted to OPRFHS and Sarah's Inn for the actions they take to prevent violence, sexual harassment, bullying and other forms of inappropriate behavior. They make it their business to bring empowerment and leadership training to all of the students.

Our three daughters attended OPRFHS. What is remarkable to me is the sensitivity and courage they feel about showing respect for others and for demanding that respect from their fellows. How different it was for me as a girl. I shudder to remember the things I suffered and witnessed in an era when young woman and men tolerated the intolerable. We did not have the vocabulary, the tools, nor the courage to tackle the rough and tumble of sexual harassment, date violence, bullying.

But here at OPRFHS, teachers and counselors collaborate with support agencies like Sarah's Inn and the R.A.D. Systems to offer the Step Back program that comprehensively and effectively empowers students to take action to prevent violence and harm. The format of this curriculum, the long term engagement with the students, its research-based content, its ability to foster a bond of trust between the teachers, trainers, advocates and students - all of this allows the instruction and training to reach deep into the hearts and minds of the students.

Advocates in the field of violence prevention know that students require in-depth engagement in a safe and supportive setting. Time and trust, a reputable and tested curriculum, along with the expertise of trained counselors and educators, allow the students to develop strong and positive ways to address conflict, abuse, and other threatening situations. In the end, this education makes students accountable, not just for their own actions, but for those of their peers.

I do wish to note the effect on the school culture and the larger community. Students, after completing this program, have a higher commitment to keeping their interactions positive and

healthy. They assume accountability for not just their own behavior; they also look out for each other. By assuming the role of the *active* bystander, they do not stand silent when another student is at risk. The safety and welfare of everyone is front and center. It is one thing for a teacher to demand respectable behavior; it is quite another for a fellow student to call out a peer and make him or her stop the harassment. As a parent, I witnessed this. My daughters shared stories calling attention to their own power and the power of the collective to effect change and make a difference.

As a high school teacher, my husband has colleagues at many other schools. He knows of no other program that holds a candle to the Step Back program. He knows that every student at every school stands to benefit from this kind of comprehensive education. The legislation, however, is not yet in place, nor the funding to properly implement this kind of comprehensive program.

Examine the costs of physical harm, broken homes, suicide, destroyed marriages... all the havoc that violence and harassment perpetuate on the innocent. What if much of this wreckage could be avoided by giving our youth the support, knowledge and sensitivity they need to build life-affirming relationships?

What could be more important than equipping students with the skills, understandings and behaviors that make them honorable and kind in their relationships?

I leave you with a Native American saying, "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I'll understand."

May we make it possible for students everywhere to understand.

May our schools and institutions empower our youth to be agents of change and part of the movement to make our communities safe for everyone.

**Testimony of: Regina Topf
Oak Park and River Forest High School**

I feel compelled to share why this class was so important to me as a new teacher.

I started at OPRFHS in fall of 2009 when I was suffering from my own depression. It was watching Linda teach this class that I gained the strength to help myself.

I also learned about domestic violence so explicitly that I was able to identify my friend's bad-relationship for 5 years in our teens as abusive.

She was then able to label that relationship and move on. After teaching the class for 4 years, each semester never ceases to amaze me. While times can be difficult, empowering the teenage girls is most important.

As a teacher I am able to create an environment that my students feel comfortable sharing their inner battles with the class as a way to help their peers. For instance, I had a student today confess that she was sexually assaulted at age 12.

And another girl 5th period talked about her sexual assault experience.

It takes time to develop the relationships with the girls, so a 10 week class is needed to reach them.

Training, support, and resources for the teacher who teach this material is very important. Without the proper training or moral support, I would not be able to do what I do.

Thank you.

**Testimony of: Kathleen O'Brien
Parent, Oak Park and River Forest High School**

Hello, my name is Katie O'Brien and my daughter Colleen graduated from OPRF High School this past June. Today, she is a freshman at DePaul University and loves living in Lincoln Park.

We moved to Oak Park two years ago from a small town in Iowa, my hometown of Keokuk, and were immediately impressed with the high school.

When I attended my first School Open House I was thrilled to hear a number of teacher's comment that they were currently in their dream job. We quickly found out that Colleen was in an environment where there is a strong passion for learning, and a commitment to diversity.

But mostly what stands out as a highlight from our move from small town to big city (Colleen left a school of a graduating class of around 150 to join her 2013 OPRF class of over 1500)...

So what stood out...was the fact that in Oak Park and similarly at OPRF there is a place for everyone to find their spot – where they are comfortable and can find fit in – free to share opinions, make friends, express creativity and be safe.

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So when Ms Carlson contacted me to present testimony today – my reply to her was an enthusiastic **YES!**

One of the places Colleen found to express herself and her creativity **was in** Ms. Carlson's Self Defense class –as a SILC leader –helping other students. Colleen was, as a SILC leader - a teacher's assistant working with Ms. Carlson and her P.E. class of ninth and tenth graders. First quarter she helped Ms. Carlson with swim lessons (Colleen is a lifeguard and swim instructor) and second quarter she helped with the Self Defense class.

So, as a parent I got to hear fun stories about the girls not wanting to get their hair wet during swim class and of other girls trying to get the courage to let go of the side of the pool and to put their faces in the water. It was also great to hear my child share one of her AHA moments – Colleen mentioned it was a sharp contrast – when she realized one person’s fun like swimming could be another person’s worst fear – like drowning. She had put herself in someone else’s shoes – and it gave her a broader life perspective.

But the stories definitely got more interesting once self- defense classes started. At the start I did not realize the scope of the self -defense classes – in my mind it was the video clip of the class where people are on blue gym floor mat learning how to flip an attacker down to the ground.

Colleen taught me the class is much more.

I believe the class 1-teaches students respect for self and others.2-helps students gain skills in open communications and provides an opportunity for frank conversations

And 3- the class gives students the tools for safety that are vital for healthy living.

I’d like to share a few stories of how those three things translate into the real world, how they positively impacted Colleen’s life:

Teaches students respect for self and others.

Our family had a blast retelling one of Colleen’s favorite stories from Ms. Carlson class. Colleen stands up in the front of the group sitting around the living room and puts her shoulders back – enacting the persona of a teacher – telling everyone “these are your goods” while scanning her hand across all body parts - and you get to decide if the “store is closed”. She also shared Ms. Carlson’s advice on trusting your instincts and believing in yourself – to tell someone when they have crossed body boundaries that are not ok.

The next story on belief #2 how the class

Helps students gain skills in open communications and provides an opportunity for frank conversations is very personal.

Colleen was bullied her freshman and sophomore year in high school. One of the reasons we moved to Oak Park was for her safety. Colleen stood up to a girl who had been bullying her. She was assaulted by the girl; she hit Colleen in the face with a bottle and shattered her nose. It was an awful situation –one that took months to recover, both physically and emotionally. Colleen and our family have become stronger from the situation –it was not easy and it has been a long road.

Through the self defense class –she has been able to share her story with other girls – on the impact of ACTIONS. How to talk through problems, have open communications and frank conversations – with parents, with teachers, with each others, their peer groups.

Colleen told me that a 9th grade girl from self -defense class had approached her during school lunch –asking to talk, to work through a problem. That is one simple, easy way that the self -defense class has helped – peer-to-peer, open communications and frank conversations.

And yes, for belief #3

the class did give Colleen the tools for safety, and teach her precautions that are vital. She would show us in the living room her stomp the foot and the scrape the shin techniques she had learned during class. No one wanted to volunteer for that skit.

The three things that I have stated that I believe the class teaches

1-teaches students respect for self and others.

2-helps students gain skills in open communications and provides an opportunity for frank conversations

And

3- gives students the tools for safety that are vital for healthy living.

Are life skills –like swimming. They should be taught in every school – big city or small town.

They will help every student in many ways.

**Testimony of: Sarah Schriber
Coordinator of Prevent School Violence Illinois**

On behalf of the Prevent School Violence Illinois coalition, I support, without reservation, the recommendation that, to be most effective, the prevention of domestic violence, and all violence prevention efforts, must be done through a framework composed of a number of critical components through which the content, contextualized to the unique school community in which the prevention is being implemented, is delivered.

- Specific programming divorced from other violence prevention efforts shows little efficacy over time.
- A framework provides the scaffolding for a comprehensive approach that is adaptable to the unique context of each educational level (e.g., elementary, middle or high school) and school community (e.g. rural, urban, racially homogenous, racially diverse.)
- Schools are mandated by law to provide a broad range of violence prevention education (e.g. cyber safety). A framework permits a school community to coordinate efforts and use scarce resources to provide violence prevention education effectively.

PSVI looks forward to the many opportunities there will be to work in partnership with the Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force and other violence prevention efforts.

**Testimony of: Dr. Bertha Buchanan
Principal CSW Career Academy of Culinary Arts**

Administrator and Educator for 46 yrs., retired in 2004 and in 2008 was asked to rejoin the Chicago Public Schools to assist in opening an alternative school located on the west side of Chicago.

“In September of 1983, my sister was killed by her husband. She sister’s husband was her high school sweetheart and they had two children while they were married.”

“The family knew nothing of the level of domestic violence that was occurring in the marriage, nor did they recognize the signs. “

“It was during the trial that the family realized that there were signs, simply because they had not had any exposure to domestic violence.”

“Young people simply don’t have the courage to speak out about the negative or unhealthy relationships they are involved.”

“On the sentencing date, the judge handed down an order of 60 years with eligibility of parole in 30 years. “

“On September 9, 2013, the anniversary of my sister’s death, the judge granted my sister’s husband parole.”

“As the director of Chicago Career Academy, she not only has the students well –being to attend to, but I also inherit the parents.”

She and the staff recognize the conditions that the students come from and strive to provide the safe haven that is needed to thrive.

When people are abused, they become fearful and too often the rescue comes too late.

Domestic Violence is not limited to one place or another, but rather it’s an issue throughout the community that has to be addressed.

State Representative Camille Lilly Remarks Closing Remarks:

Camille Lilly commended the vision of Dorothy Brown Clerk of the Circuit Court.

“Domestic Violence in today’s form gives a broader definition than marital and sexual relationships.”

“The task force has broadened the definition of domestic violence and the teachers and parents need the support of this program.”

“Through this program teachers have learned to identify depression within them and assist friends to recognize domestic relationships.”

“Having teachers properly trained and passionate to the classes is the most beneficial.

“The support given and provided to the instructor and teacher are key to the success of the program.”

The school assemblies are not long term trainings, but the ongoing trainings have substance and students carry their skills on to college.

Staff training and relationship building aides in the delivery and the responding to difficult and delicate topics

Identifying core elements and best practices will be the starting point to build a program that works.

The testimony of the students who continue to use the tools from the Step Back Program should become the best practices

Dorothy Brown Clerk of the Circuit Court Closing Remarks:

Good Afternoon. I thank everyone here for attending today’s Public Hearing for the Eradicate Domestic Violence Task. Your input is very important to this process and we appreciate your participation.

I thank Superintendent **Steven Isoye** for allowing this Public Hearing to take place here in Oak Park & River Forest School District 200.

And, I expressly thank **Rep. Camille Lilly**, co-chair of the Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force, and our moderator **Mr. Chris Ptak**, Prevention Program Director, Sarah’s Inn, and co-chair of the Eradicate Domestic Violence Task Force.

I also wish to acknowledge my staff who are diligently working on this initiative: **Ms. Enza Raineri**, Associate Clerk of the Criminal Bureau, **Ms. Doree McGregor**, Criminal Division, and Public Information staff members, **Ms. Treana Johnson** and **Ms. Catrina Patton**.

I sincerely appreciate the students who gave testimony today. That was a brave and thoughtful gesture on your part. I am also grateful to the parents, teachers, school administrators and experts in domestic violence prevention who are helping us in the effort to develop a statewide prevention program aimed at adolescent violence.

I join all of you in your concern about ending domestic violence by reaching our youth at an impressionable age and teaching them how to prevent interpersonal adolescent violence.

I personally believe that when we equip young people with life skills to manage conflict, we can eradicate domestic violence as we know it. It's simple: if we know better, we do better.

I am very happy to be the administrator of this process. I want to see this project through to its full implementation in our schools. Domestic violence is a devastating problem that cuts across all socio-economic, racial and gender lines, and age groups. The detrimental effects of domestic violence are far reaching and long lasting.

An early intervention program that aims to prevent domestic violence is the best way to tackle this issue. The Eradicate Domestic Violence Task is charged with finding the best, sustainable, school program for accomplishing this crucial goal. We are glad to have such an effective model as the Step Back program to consider.

I thank Governor Quinn for signing the bill to create this Task Force, and I thank everyone involved for bringing us closer to eradicating domestic violence, once and for all.

Hearing Adjourned at 3:45 p.m.