

By: Representatives Fondren, Felsher

To: Education

HOUSE BILL NO. 975

1 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH "MISSISSIPPI COMPREHENSIVE ANTI-BULLYING
2 AND CYBERBULLYING ACT OF 2025", WHICH SHALL SERVE AS PHASED-IN
3 PILOT PROGRAM IN MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOLS; TO PROVIDE THAT THE
4 PROGRAM'S PURPOSE IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION
5 FOR BOTH VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING;
6 TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR REDUCING BULLYING INCIDENTS AND
7 FOSTERING A CULTURE OF EMPATHY AND RESPECT IN SCHOOL; TO DEFINE
8 TERMINOLOGY; TO REQUIRE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO DEVELOP
9 AND OVERSEE THE PHASED-IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE
10 ANTI-BULLYING PILOT PROGRAM; TO REQUIRE EACH SCHOOL DISTRICT TO
11 DESIGNATE AN ANTI-BULLYING COORDINATOR TO MONITOR PROGRAM
12 IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORT OUTCOMES TO THE DEPARTMENT; TO REQUIRE
13 THE DEPARTMENT TO SELECT INITIAL SCHOOLS SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE
14 IN THE PILOT PROGRAM BASED ON SCHOOLS HAVING THE HIGHEST
15 INCIDENCES OF BULLYING, UNLAWFUL ACTIVITY AND STUDENTS CHARGED
16 WITH CRIMES AS SUCH DATA IS REQUIRED TO BE REPORTED TO THE
17 DEPARTMENT BY EACH SCHOOL DISTRICT; TO BRING FORWARD SECTIONS
18 37-11-67 AND 37-11-69, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, WHICH ARE
19 PROVISIONS ADDRESSING BULLYING OR HARASSING BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS,
20 FOR THE PURPOSE OF POSSIBLE AMENDMENT; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

21 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

22 **SECTION 1.** This act shall be known, and may be cited as the
23 "Mississippi Comprehensive Anti-Bullying and Cyberbullying Act of
24 2025."

25 **SECTION 2.** (1) The Legislature finds that:



(a) One (1) in five (5) students report being bullied, with many experiencing repeated incidents that negatively impact mental health, academic performance and relationships;

(b) Research indicates that eighty percent (80%) of school shooters had experienced bullying, and students who are bullied are at higher risk for depression, anxiety and dropping out of school;

(c) Students who bully others often face long-term consequences, including criminal convictions and abusive behavior in adulthood;

(d) Data from the National Institute of Justice shows a twenty percent (20%) reduction in bullying incidents in schools implementing comprehensive anti-bullying programs; and

(e) A phased, structured approach to program implementation can balance costs with long-term benefits, such as improved academic outcomes, reduced absenteeism and safer school environments.

(2) This act seeks to:

(a) Establish a phased-in, comprehensive anti-bullying program in all public schools across Mississippi;

(b) Provide support and intervention for both victims and perpetrators of bullying and cyberbullying; and

(c) Create a sustainable model for reducing bullying incidents and fostering a culture of empathy and respect in schools.



51 **SECTION 3.** For the purposes of this act, the following terms
52 shall have the meanings herein ascribed, unless context clearly
53 requires otherwise:

54 (a) "Bullying or harassing behavior" any pattern of
55 gestures or written, electronic or verbal communications, or any
56 physical act or any threatening communication, or any act
57 reasonably perceived as being motivated by any actual or perceived
58 differentiating characteristic, that takes place on school
59 property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus,
60 and that:

61 (i) Places a student or school employee in actual
62 and reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his
63 or her property; or

64 (ii) Creates or is certain to create a hostile
65 environment by substantially interfering with or impairing a
66 student's educational performance, opportunities or benefits. For
67 purposes of this section, "hostile environment" means that the
68 victim subjectively views the conduct as bullying or harassing
69 behavior and the conduct is objectively severe or pervasive enough
70 that a reasonable person would agree that it is bullying or
71 harassing behavior.

72 (b) "Cyberbullying" means bullying conducted through
73 electronic communication, including social media, text messaging
74 and email.



(c) "Program" means the comprehensive anti-bullying program established under this act.

SECTION 4. (1) The State Department of Education shall develop and oversee the phased-in implementation of a comprehensive anti-bullying pilot program, which provides for:

(a) Training for teachers, staff and administrators on identifying and addressing bullying.

(b) Counseling and mental health support for victims of bullying.

(c) Intervention, counseling, and rehabilitation for students identified as perpetrators of bullying; and

(d) School-wide educational campaigns to promote empathy, diversity and respect.

(2) Each school district shall designate an Anti-Bullying Coordinator to monitor program implementation and report outcomes to the department.

(3) The department shall oversee the implementation of schools into the pilot program based on school districts reporting schools located therein having highest incidences of bullying, unlawful activity and students charged with crimes as such data is required to be reported to the department under the provisions of Sections 37-11-29 and 37-11-69. The program shall be phased-in as follows:

(a) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, comprehensive anti-bullying pilot programs shall be implemented in



ten percent (10%) of schools statewide, with an emphasis on high-need areas, as determined by the department under the authority of this subsection;

(b) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, the comprehensive anti-bullying program shall be expanded to encompass implementation in fifty percent (50%) of schools statewide, incorporating lessons and strategies learned from schools selected for participation as a pilot school site; and

(c) Beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, the comprehensive anti-bullying program shall be fully implemented across all public schools in the state, with periodic assessments and adjustments.

SECTION 5. (1) Schools shall maintain detailed records of bullying incidents in accordance with Section 37-11-69(1)(f) and program outcomes.

(2) The State Department of Education shall submit an annual report to the Legislature, summarizing program progress of the program's effectiveness and recommendations for improvements.

SECTION 6. (1) The Legislature shall allocate funds to the State Department of Education for program development, training and evaluation.

(2) School districts may seek grants or partnerships with local organizations to supplement resources.

SECTION 7. Section 37-11-67, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:



37-11-67. (1) As used in this section, "bullying or harassing behavior" is any pattern of gestures or written, electronic or verbal communications, or any physical act or any threatening communication, or any act reasonably perceived as being motivated by any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus, and that:

(a) Places a student or school employee in actual and reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property; or

(b) Creates or is certain to create a hostile environment by substantially interfering with or impairing a student's educational performance, opportunities or benefits. For purposes of this section, "hostile environment" means that the victim subjectively views the conduct as bullying or harassing behavior and the conduct is objectively severe or pervasive enough that a reasonable person would agree that it is bullying or harassing behavior.

(2) No student or school employee shall be subjected to bullying or harassing behavior by school employees or students.

(3) No person shall engage in any act of reprisal or retaliation against a victim, witness or a person with reliable information about an act of bullying or harassing behavior.

(4) A school employee who has witnessed or has reliable information that a student or school employee has been subject to



any act of bullying or harassing behavior shall report the incident to the appropriate school official.

(5) A student or volunteer who has witnessed or has reliable information that a student or school employee has been subject to any act of bullying or harassing behavior should report the incident to the appropriate school official.

(6) Conduct described in subsection (1) of this section is considered bullying if that conduct interferes with a student's education or substantially disrupts the operation of a school.

SECTION 8. Section 37-11-69, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-11-69. (1) Each local school district shall include in its personnel policies, discipline policies and code of student conduct a prohibition against bullying or harassing behavior and adopt procedures for reporting, investigating and addressing such behavior, that:

(a) Prohibit the bullying of a student;

(b) Prohibit retaliation against any person, including a victim, a witness, or another person, who in good faith provides information concerning an incident of bullying;

(c) Establish a procedure for providing notice of an incident of bullying to a parent or guardian of the victim and a parent or guardian of the bully within a reasonable amount of time after the incident;



(d) Establish the actions a student should take to obtain assistance and intervention in response to bullying;

(e) Set out the available counseling options for a student who is a victim of or a witness to bullying or who engages in bullying;

(f) Establish procedures for reporting an incident of bullying, investigating a reported incident of bullying and determining whether the reported incident of bullying occurred;

(g) Prohibit the imposition of a disciplinary measure on a student who, after an investigation, is found to be a victim of bullying, on the basis of that student's use of reasonable self-defense in response to the bullying; and

(h) Require that discipline for bullying of a student with disabilities comply with applicable requirements under federal law, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 USCS Section 1400 et seq.).

(2) The policies must recognize the fundamental right of every student to take reasonable actions as may be necessary to defend himself or herself from an attack by another student who has evidenced menacing or threatening behavior through bullying or harassing.

(3) The procedure for reporting bullying established under subsection (1) of this section must be posted on the district's Internet website.



198 **SECTION 9.** The provisions of this act are severable. If any
199 part of this act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, such
200 declaration shall not affect the parts of this act which remain.

201 **SECTION 10.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
202 and after July 1, 2025.

