



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

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Memo of Support – S.6366-A (Oberacker) / A.6597-A (Kay)

The Lower Hudson Education Coalition is an organization comprised of school board members and school superintendents from 96 school districts in Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester Counties educating more than 10% of the students in this state. We strongly support S.6366-A (Oberacker) / A.6597-A (Kay). This bill amends the Criminal Procedure Law to add new criminal offenses of aggravated harassment, making or aggravating a threat of mass harm and making a terroristic threat committed against a school district, school, school staff or student.

With the rise in threats against our schools, this legislation represents a meaningful and necessary step toward strengthening public safety in our schools by creating significant legal penalties for individuals charged with making threats of mass harm or engaging in harassment directed at schools, school personnel, or students. Adding these to the list of crimes for which a court may address will improve the safety of our students and educators.

In recent years, schools across New York State have seen a troubling increase in threats, ranging from vague social media posts to direct threats of violence. These threats disrupt the educational environment, impact teaching and learning and place entire communities on edge. Despite the serious nature of these threats, current law is inadequate and this will create a new set of penalties and enable judicial discretion to impose bail. Currently, individuals responsible for these alarming offenses may be released back into the community. S.6366-A / A.6597-A closes this gap by explicitly making such offenses bail-eligible when they are directed at educational institutions or their members.

We view this legislation as a responsible and balanced response to the evolving security challenges schools face. Judges and Courts, not school administrators, should be the ones who consider the severity of the offense, the risk posed by the defendant in cases where the stakes are exceptionally high, and set the penalty. By restoring this critical tool to the courts, this legislation empowers the justice system to better protect the state's learning environment.

This measure will not only serve as a deterrent to those considering targeting schools with threats or harassment but also enhance enforcement. It sends a clear message that such actions will be taken seriously and met with appropriate consequences.



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The Coalition believes that this legislation is a step forward for public safety policy that aligns with the real-world needs of schools today. We urge lawmakers to act swiftly in passing this legislation to provide our students, staff, and families with the level of protection they deserve.