

1/21/04

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Dr. Beth McCreary and I am a clinical psychologist, educated at The Ohio State University. Today I will speak to you on behalf of the Ohio Psychological Association, within which I currently chair the Public Interest Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in opposition to HB 265.

HB 265 would grant immunity from liability to educators who choose to use corporal punishment in schools. I'd like to make four points today in regard to this bill:

- 1) **Corporal punishment does not work (and there are effective alternatives).**
- 2) **Corporal punishment hurts children.**
- 3) **Corporal punishment perpetuates the cycle of violence.**
- 4) **HB 265 is not necessary, given the immunities already afforded to educators in the course of disciplinary action.**

I will elaborate briefly on each of these points in turn.

First, corporal punishment does not work.

- a. *Punishment, at best, teaches what NOT to do, not what TO do.* Paddling John for hitting another student teaches John not to get caught hitting other students, or else someone bigger and more powerful will hit him. It does not teach John how to talk through a disagreement with another student so that he doesn't have to hit.
- b. *There is NO evidence to show that schools using corporal punishment have teachers who are better protected from student violence.* In fact, data have shown that children who are punished show an increase in aggressiveness, sometimes engaging in retaliatory aggressive behavior. Schools using corporal punishment have been shown to have poorer academic achievement, higher dropout rates, more student violence, and greater homicide rates than schools in which corporal punishment has been banned. Passing a bill that would, in effect, condone the use of aggression by teachers in the course of disciplining students is actually likely to increase student aggression.
- c. *Effective alternative strategies to corporal punishment do exist.* For example: peer mediation programs have been very effective in teaching students to employ empathic, active listening and problem solving skills to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations themselves. Other effective programs teach students to be appropriately accountable for their behaviors; recognize positive behaviors from students; and increase parent involvement in schools. In addition, teachers around the state of Ohio have access to special education research centers where such programs are funded and taught to educators. Teachers do have support for learning to implement alternatives to corporal punishment.

Second, corporal punishment hurts children.

In the short-term, children subjected to physical forms of punishment often show increased anxiety, fear of authority, social withdrawal, depressed mood, poorer self-esteem, and sometimes more difficulty sleeping and eating and even higher rates of suicidal ideation compared to children who are not physically punished. In addition, corporal punishment of children is associated with increased aggressive behaviors, including violence against romantic partners, in later life. Further, when children feel fearful of being punished for mistakes, when they feel humiliated by having been paddled, when they feel tired because they have not slept well due to having been punished at school, or angry and resentful for having been physically punished, they do not concentrate well. Thus, school work and learning are disrupted by corporal punishment.

Third, corporal punishment in the schools perpetuates the cycle of violence.

Children who are disciplined through aggressive means learn to use aggression to solve problems. In fact, even witnessing aggression against others increases the likelihood that children and adults alike will act aggressively themselves. When children witness parents and educators using corporal punishment in response to undesirable behaviors, they naturally conclude that this is the “normal,” *acceptable* way to respond when someone does something they don’t like.

Many parents were subjected themselves to some form of corporal punishment in the home as children, and have not been trained in alternative strategies of discipline. Many proponents of spanking for young children in the home would argue that spanking should be used to indicate to a child that s/he should not be engaging in a given behavior. However, in reality, parents and educators tend to use corporal punishment strategies at times when they are angry with a child’s behavior; inflicting physical punishment discharges this anger, temporarily making the parent or educator “feel better.” People usually repeat behaviors that make them feel better when distressed. This makes corporal punishment a highly self-reinforced and very difficult-to-stop behavior. Condoning the use of corporal punishment in the schools sends the message to parents at home that it is an acceptable form of discipline. Schools have an opportunity to set examples for both parents and children, to show alternatives to the use of corporal punishment rather than reinforcing its use.

Fourth, HB 265 is not necessary.

Educators already have immunity against injuries that occur to students while the educators are doing their jobs. In fact, it’s very difficult for a student to file an injury suit against an educator and win; several examples of this could be cited.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of the Ohio Psychological Association and Ohio’s school children, I urge you to vote NO on HB 265. I am happy to address any questions you may have at this time.

Resources for Further Reading

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