

Date: Feb 27, 2011; Section: Front Page; Page: 1-A

# Bill to redefine bullying

Opponents say schools given too much reach

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The Dominion Post

CHARLESTON — A bill to expand the definition of school bullying and harassment sparked



emotional debate Friday in the House Judiciary Committee.

Opponents said the bill oversteps its bounds and gives schools far too much reach into family territory. Proponents argued that kids are getting hurt and need protection.

Bullying off school grounds can affect kids at school, said Delegate Mike Caputo, D-Marion. "Children should not be afraid to go to school. I am sick and tired of hearing the horror stories. ... It's a crime [that] children need to live in fear."

An amended version of HB 3225, from the Education Committee, says harassment, intimidation and bullying have "the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or

group of students in such a way as to cause disruption in or interference with the orderly operation of the school. [It] creates a hostile educational environment for the student by interfering with a student's education or by severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to the student."

It adds e-bullying by phone,

SEE **BILL**, 6-A

Date: Feb 27, 2011; Section: Local & State; Page: 6-A

## **BILL**

FROM PAGE 1-A

text or images to the forms of bullying. It contains a provision for referrals to juvenile court.

It adds also that the action may originate on or off school grounds if it "is directed specifically at a student and maliciously intended for the purpose of disrupting school or creating a hostile educational environment for the student, and

has a high likelihood of succeeding in that purpose."

Opponent Patrick Lane, R-Kanawha and father of a 14-year-old daughter, said, "I think this goes pretty darn far. It extends school jurisdiction everywhere. ... This is far, far, far too reaching. You've got to say to parents, 'You're responsible for your children.' "

Opponents worried that a Saturday Little League fight could lead to consequences at school Monday.

Delegate Meshea Poore, D-Kanawha, countered that schools are forced to babysit kids because of deadbeat and uninvolved parents.

Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, said, "Teachers say parents are not involved. They are begging for parents to be more involved."

In a divided voice vote, the majority sided with Poore and Fleischauer. The committee sent the bill to the full House.