



Wisconsin School Social Workers Association

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 311, Relating to Threats to Use a Dangerous Weapon on School Property to Injure or Kill a Person

The Wisconsin School Social Workers Association (WSSWA) fully supports making our schools safer for everybody. WSSWA commends the authors of Senate Bill 311 for their efforts in trying to reach this goal. Unfortunately, based on our experiences working in schools, WSSWA feels it must oppose SB 311 as currently drafted.

SB 311, and its companion, AB 338, would create a crime for intentionally conveying any threat or false information concerning an attempt to use a dangerous weapon to injure or kill a person on school property, on transportation provided by a school, or to an event sanctioned by a school. It would be a Class I felony.

To move right away to legal consequences when a student makes a threat of violence can do more harm than good for both the student and the learning community. It ignores assessment procedures and tools already in place, such as the violence risk assessment. This is where a team of specialists takes into account the individual student and their development to determine next steps. To ignore these steps would be to fuel the school to prison pipeline, therefore missing the opportunity to educate and help the student.

Law enforcement should clearly be involved in supporting the structured process and assessment. Restitution may be involved, but more importantly it should be for the purpose of restoring the community to safety and the student to the community. Cognitive decision making skills are not fully developed in adolescents. To charge a student's developmentally impulsive threat as a felony is to ignore the situation as a potential cry for help. All the help that could be given is lost and instead a criminal record may be created.

We support actions that include researched based efforts such as restorative justice that holds students accountable as well as teaches them the outcomes of their actions to avoid impulsive behavior in the future. We look forward to continuing to work with legislators to achieve these goals. Thank you for considering our views.