

**REMARKS**  
**Attorney General Tom Corbett**  
**Project PEACE – Cyber Bullying Program**  
**November 8, 2007**

Across Pennsylvania, children and their families have settled into the start of the school year... new teachers and friends... homework and football games.

But for some students... the start of the school year is far from a happy occasion. It fills them with anxiety and fear... just of walking through the halls of their schools.

There are some empty desks in Pennsylvania classrooms this fall. Why? Cyber Bullying.

With Project PEACE... we focus mainly on the types of bullying we experienced as children – name calling or pushing. But.... Bullying has now gone far beyond a whisper in the hall or a push on the playground. Like everything else... bullying has met the information super highway.

“Cyber Bullying” is defined as the use of electronic devices, such as e-mail, instant messaging, web sites or even text messages, to send cruel or harmful messages or images about an individual or group.

Why is this so dangerous? Because it can be anonymous and ..... unlike face-to-face bullying, there is no refuge for the victims as cyber bullying can go on 24-hours a day for the entire world to see.

With nearly three-quarters of this country’s kids online and many of them equipped with cell phones, the bully not only have the playground, but also the internet at his or her fingertips to electronically assault other children.

They are predators.

It happens at school, at home, at the mall.... Cyber bullying is invading our children’s lives. This invisible attack against our kids can be terrorizing and a real threat to their safety and to the safety of others in the future.

And while we’d like to think that this only happens in high schools... the sad fact is it is happening to students as young as six and seven. If they can go on the internet, they can fall victim to predators.

I’d like to share some recent statistics from a poll done one year ago by fight crime: Invest in kids.

**According to the poll:**

- **One-third of all teen and one-sixth of children ages 6-11 have had mean, threatening or embarrassing things said about them online.**
- **10% of teens and 4% of elementary –age children were threatened online with physical harm.**
- **16% of the teens and preteens who were victims of cyber bullying told not one about it. About 50% of children 6-11 told their parents about the hurtful messages ..... but only 30% of the older kids told their parents.**
- **Interestingly enough... preteens were as likely to receive harmful messages at school as at home. For older children, 30% of harmful messages were received at school and 70% at home.**
- **A disturbing finding... 60% of boys who were bullies in middle school were convicted of at least one crime by age 24.**

**There are millions of stories from across the country of children who have been cyber bullied, including a 13-year-old who committed suicide in 2005 in Connecticut.**

**I'd like to share with you a case of cyber bullying that happened right here in Pennsylvania.**

**This 13-year-old girl did not return to school last year or this year. Her desk is empty. She now attends a cyber school.**

**Interestingly enough, the parents of the cyber bullies did nothing to punish their children. These kids are still on the internet using social networking sites as if nothing happened.**

**But.... What can schools do? As educators, counselors and administrators... you are on the front lines with this issue everyday and often serve as the first line of defense in protecting our children from the dangers of the internet.**

**Kids access the internet any way they can... wireless networks... computer labs... even laptops are commonplace in schools. Kids can't seem to function without cell phones with internet capabilities anymore.**

**But the same technologies that offer great learning opportunities... also offer a great deal of concern.**

**I'd like to see a show of hands.....**

- **How many of your schools or districts have “no cell phone” policies?**
- **How many of your schools or districts have strict internet policies?**
- **All school districts have bullying policies and many of them are starting to incorporate cyber bullying policies as well. How many of your districts have expanded policies to include cyber bullying?**

- **How many of you have had issues with cyber bullying in your schools or school districts?**

**Online sexual predators, social networking and cyber bullying are serious issues that schools across Pennsylvania and the country are facing every day. They also pose interesting legal concerns for school districts.**

**This information is uncharted territory for many districts. There are so many questions that need to be answered whether district by district, legislatively or through the courts.**

**For now... schools should begin to have a dialogue with students about cyber bullying and to put into place corrective actions if students are found to be cyber bullying other students during school.**

**It needs to be approached just as you would bullying. How you handle the bully in the hall is one way to handle the bully on the computer. Students need to understand that you see the online bullies, too.**

**As you work on your mediation plans today and tomorrow.... Andy Susko and I ask you to keep cyber bullying in mind and find ways to incorporate it into your planning.**

**It's so important for us all to work together to address this problem – schools, law enforcement and parents. We must give our children the tools they need to make wise decisions and protect themselves from harm.**