# COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

**Steven L. Beshear**
Governor

**Audrey Tayse Haynes, Secretary**
Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

**Dr. Terry Holliday, Commissioner**
Kentucky Department of Education

August 22, 2014

Honorable Steven L. Beshear, Governor
Commonwealth of Kentucky
Governor's Office
State Capitol
700 Capitol Avenue
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Governor Beshear:

As you are well aware, bullying is a serious challenge for many of Kentucky's youth. Last year alone, the Kentucky Department of Education received reports of 15,520 bullying or harassment incidents in the 2012-13 school year. Of that total, 6,941 of those incidents resulted in an out-of-school suspension or expulsion, and doubtless there are thousands more which went unreported. We believe that vision, communication, and leadership are needed to generate the necessary impact in our communities to reduce bullying.

In making the case for active engagement on this issue, it is important to realize that the effects of bullying on youth reverberate throughout our society for years after the fact. It has impacts on our criminal justice system: approximately 60 percent of those identified as bullies in grades six through nine were convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24. It impacts our educational attainment and ultimately workforce readiness: one study found that 10 percent of dropouts give bullying as their main reason for leaving school. And, perhaps most gravely, bullying impacts youth safety: research suggests that bullying is a significant factor in teen suicides. Kentucky has the 17th highest suicide death rate and suicide is the second leading cause of death for Kentucky youth.

We both strive to provide safer environments and safer schools for children, and to this end we ask you to create a statewide taskforce to study and provide leadership on this issue. Goals of this taskforce would align with the U. S. Department of Education's goals around bullying and will include:

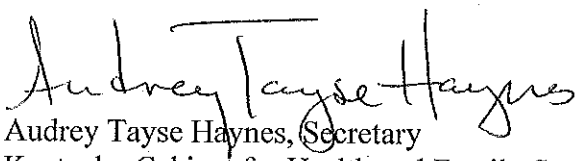
- Raising awareness of bullying within our schools, as well as afterschool;
- Better utilizing training and informational resources for educators, parents, and communities;
- Providing families and law enforcement with tools to address cyber bullying;

- Building support for any necessary legislative action;
- Incorporating suicide prevention and mental health resources into the broader discussion; and
- Leveraging non-profit and community support to combat bullying.

By convening stakeholders from across the commonwealth with shared goals, we're confident we can come to tangible, workable, solutions. Our agencies are prepared to offer any and all support necessary to support this initiative. We both share a steadfast commitment to this work and are ready and eager to lead the charge for Kentucky's children.

Sincerely,

Terry Holliday, Commissioner
Kentucky Department of Education



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