

TEXT 2 STOP IT!™

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For Immediate Release

Governor Hogan of Maryland signs anti-bullying bill, HB 669, to improve student reporting of bullying and other harmful activities by anonymous two-way electronic tips

Annapolis, MD April 18, 2017 - Today Governor Larry Hogan signed [House Bill 669](#). This bill will give school students in Maryland the ability to report bullying, harassment and intimidation, drugs, suicide concerns and other harmful activities through anonymous electronic tips. The bill further mandates the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to track these anonymous two-way tips and make this a part of their annual Bully, Harassment and Intimidation report to the General Assembly.



Governor Larry Hogan, along with Senate President Thomas V. "Mike" Miller and Speaker of the House Mike Busch. Alvin Butler, Text 2 Stop It! Executive Director standing. Delegate Arentz (sponsor) and Liam Kim (student), who testified on bill, not pictured.

Sponsored by Delegate Steve Arentz, District 36, and supported by the Maryland State PTA, HB 669 passed the Maryland House 144-0 and Senate 46-0 and now becomes law in the state of Maryland on October 1, 2017.

In House testimony Elizabeth Ysla Leight, President of the Maryland PTA stated: *"Maryland PTA especially favors the broadening of reporting such acts to involve technology compared to hard-copy paper work. Oftentimes students as well as parents find it difficult to report such acts using paper because they don't know where to find reporting forms or they don't want to be seen obtaining such information for fear of retaliation."*

This new law is based on a program implemented in Queen Anne's County Maryland Public Schools (QACPS), called Text 2 Stop It!, which makes the reporting of bullying easier for students and has resulted in a 71% reduction in bullying reports in their school district over a four year period.

Liam Kim, a Montgomery County High School Student [who testified on HB669](#), stated, *"The current system of requiring students to fill out a form and turn it into the office doesn't work...it's antiquated."* He also stated that, *"Every student carries an iPhone in their pockets and it is time for the school system to move to the 21st Century."*

Currently, in QACPS and most recently in Talbot County Public Schools, to utilize Text 2 Stop It! a student witnessing anything they wish to report simply texts the keyword to the number and anonymously reports the information to Text 2 Stop It! operators who are available 24/7. The person reporting the incident is then engaged in a two-way text conversation whereby Text 2 Stop It! obtains



the details, including dates, places, witnesses, perpetrators, etc. The transcript of the conversation is IMMEDIATELY emailed to the school counselors and/ or other designated administrators. If

it is an emergency, such as weapons, suicide or fights, the school will receive a text alert or phone call from Text 2 Stop It! along with the transcript.

Students are not only using this to report bullying, but also, drug use, drug dealers, suicides and everything they consider harmful to their safety. To date, Text 2 Stop It! has intervened in seven suicides, and they have exposed drug dealers in half of the middle and high schools they are in. Text 2 Stop It! believes, by expanding the Text 2 Stop It! program statewide, and adding enhancements such as anonymous two-way web-chat, online Bullying and Harassment Reporting Forms, and including forms for reporting additional harmful issues like drugs, weapons and suicide, our schools can become safer.

Background

Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005

The Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005 became effective on July 1, 2005. The law (Education Article §7-424, Annotated Code) required the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to require a county board of education and the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners to report incidents of harassment or intimidation against students in public schools under the county board's and commission's jurisdiction. Additionally, MSDE was required to create and distribute a "Standard Victim of Harassment or Intimidation Report Form", and to submit a report to the Maryland General Assembly consisting of a summary of the information included in the victim of harassment and intimidation forms filed with the county and Baltimore City boards the previous school year.

Text 2 Stop It! and Text2Them, Inc.

Text 2 Stop It, Inc. is a nonprofit established in the state of Maryland. Text2Them, Inc. is a privately held corporation and has developed a software platform that allows two-way text communication between cell phone users and organizations. This technology, licensed by Text 2 Stop It! allows the two-way anonymous texting used in schools under the program.

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