

**TESTIMONY OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENTS AGAINST
VIOLENCE EVERYWHERE (SAVE)**

before the

United States House Committee on Education and Labor's

Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities

and

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education

presented by

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Chairwoman McCarthy, Chairman Kildee, and other members of this distinguished panel, it is my pleasure to speak to you today from a student perspective on strengthening school safety through bullying.

I am Cassady Tetsworth, a rising senior at Northwest Guilford High School in Greensboro, North Carolina. I am 17 years old and a returning member of the Youth Advisory Board of the National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE). Next year I will also serve as President of my school's SAVE chapter. I was drawn to SAVE because I can voice my opinions about how to stop youth violence. I remember my first year as a SAVE member in middle school and how it hooked me to help, as my friends were being bullied and harassed. I thought it was amazing to see so many kids coming together for a cause.

The National Association of Student's Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE), a public nonprofit, peer to peer organization, is a student-initiated and student-directed organization. SAVE is dedicated to providing students with the information and resources necessary to make a positive difference in safety efforts in schools and communities. The National Association of SAVE serves as the national clearinghouse for SAVE materials; provides training and technical assistance; coordinates chapters across the country; sponsors a national youth summit; and works with students,

counselors, teachers, administrators, law-enforcement and community agencies to establish and maintain SAVE chapters.

SAVE's slogan is Youth Voices... Grown-up Choices!

SAVE's mission is to decrease the potential for violence and bullying in schools and communities by promoting meaningful student involvement, education, and service opportunities in efforts to establish, support and grow SAVE chapters. We want to actively involve students in their own safety.

Through a group of volunteers and resourceful student members, SAVE chapters are growing and making a positive difference across the nation. SAVE is a unique and powerful approach to school safety because it recognizes the role that young people can take in making schools and communities safer by reducing bullying. Because SAVE chapters are established and operated by students, they have the opportunity to spread the message of how to prevent and reduce bullying among their peers. Focusing on crime prevention, conflict management and service projects, SAVE students are providing positive peer influences in bullying and violence prevention efforts. Recent evaluations reflect the successful efforts of SAVE students working to improve school connectedness, build respect, and establish a safer physical environment, as well as decreasing harassment and bullying at their schools.

I am proud to be part of an organization that has been successfully implemented at Northwest Guilford High School, as well as other urban, suburban, and rural schools, juvenile justice facilities, colleges, and community-based settings. SAVE works because kids like to fit in with the group by listening to and paying attention to what other kids do and say. SAVE allows kids to choose safe and healthy behaviors over unsafe and unhealthy behaviors – to use the power of positive peer influences.

My chapter did "Fall into SAVE" at our school's band competition. We set up a table with SAVE information for visitors to learn about our chapter and help us recruit members. As a service project, we collected items to donate to our troops and also sent them letters. We were also in charge of ensuring a safe prom night for all students, so we had students sign a pledge saying that they would not drink or

participate in any crime or violent behavior on Prom night (Example of the Power of Positive Peer Influence). We made shirts that show statistics of people being victims of violence. We dress in all black and each member of our chapter represents someone who was a victim of violence. These projects focused on increasing interaction and appreciation between students, teachers, and other school personnel.

The reason that our SAVE chapter makes a positive difference is that we emphasize the following SAVE goals:

Engage, Empower, Encourage, and Educate:

1. Engage

You can engage students by getting them involved and active. This makes them care more about the cause. This was evident in our school's SAVE Rock-A-Thon. Seeing other students that want to make a difference, made them want to make a difference also (positive peer influence).

2. Empower

SAVE empowers youth with skills necessary to provide service to their community and school. My chapter role-plays possible bullying situations during meetings - so students can be better equipped as to what they should do when someone else is being bullied.

3. Encourage

SAVE encourages positive peer influences. When students outside of SAVE see our members helping and being active in violence prevention, they are more apt to be curious and want to help. This can be seen through anything as simple as wearing our SAVE shirts or putting up posters.

4. Educate

SAVE educates students about the effects and consequences of bullying and violence with presentations, role-playing, and other activities. It also teaches safe activities for students, parents, and the community.

Safety is enhanced when SAVE chapters exist in schools and communities. I recommend that a student involvement component, such as SAVE, be a part of every school's comprehensive safety plan. Students should be given a real voice in safety.

I also believe ways to obtain more accurate data on school crime, bullying, and other violent incidents should be explored so that schools will have the information that is needed to plan for safer environments for all students. Data is often outdated by the time it is ready to be used. There also needs to be student input – the student voice - should be heard. If you don't know what your real and perceived challenges are, how can you make successful plans to overcome these challenges?

Does a feeling of safety help a student concentrate on schoolwork? Some may say no, but as a student, I feel that safety is one of the most important things. When a student feels safe, when tolerance overcomes bullying and harassment, and when there is respect in student-to-student, teacher-to-student, and adult-to-adult interactions, students don't have to worry about anything but their classes. I think our SAVE activities helped make our school safer.

Finally, with your help SAVE's vision for all students everywhere can be realized: Schools and communities will be safer and more secure, free of fear and bullying, and more conducive to learning as a result of students being actively involved in meaningful violence prevention efforts.

Thank you.