



April 5, 2016

## Parental Cyber-bullying

In this General Assembly, I introduced legislation that will combat the current trend of parental cyber-bullying or social shaming. The bill is currently being considered in committee. Social shaming, a form of child discipline, is a trend that some believe may be a form of child abuse.

It is not the role of government to tell or force parents how to discipline their children, but it is the role of government to protect children from any form of child abuse. We have to prevent parental social shaming against children. Things in the cyberspace could create a lifetime negative mental and social impacts on a child's life. In addition, they could hurt the child's ability to gain access to quality schools or quality employment.

House Bill 4228 amends the Clerks of Courts Act and the Criminal Code of 2012 and creates the offense of parental cyber-bullying. The bill provides that a person commits the offense when he or she: (1) is a parent or legal guardian of a minor who is under 18 years of age at the time of the commission of the offense; and (2) with the intent to discipline, embarrass, or alter the behavior of that minor, transmits, using electronic communication, any verbal or visual message posted on social media that the parent or legal guardian reasonably believes would coerce, intimidate, harass, or cause substantial emotional distress to the minor. The legislation provides that a violation is a petty offense, and provides that if a person is convicted of parental cyber-bullying, the court shall order that person to pay for the costs of prosecution and that a portion of the fine, as determined by the court, be placed in escrow for the purchase of a certificate of deposit for use by the minor victim when he or she attains 18 years of age.

The physiological aftermath of social shaming is real and can come with tragic consequences. A 13 year old teen from Tacoma killed herself days after a shaming video was posted online of her father cutting off her hair. Police reported the teen jumped to her death from a Tacoma bridge days after the video posted. Author Danette King, of the book series The Bruises from My Mother's Love, shared her dismay of the current form of social media discipline.

"Social media humiliation is not a form of discipline - it is parental cyber-bullying in its worst form," said King. "Devouring one's self-esteem will only cause self-hate and someday will cause harm to others."

Shaming social media postings can also set children up for behavior health issues based on the exposure of the discipline imposed on them. Parents at the time of their action may not be aware of the

unintended complications and consequences of their actions. This law will be an attempt to encourage more personal and effective ways to help redirect a child's negative behavior.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSF', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District