

Testimony by Radeha Haque
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October 30, 2017

Re: New York City Council Hearing re: Department of Education's Response to Incidents of Bullying, Harassment, and Discrimination in NYC Schools and Efforts to Improve School Climate

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Radeha Haque. I am a 9th grade student at the Bronx High School of Science and I participated in Generation Citizen's Action Civics program this past spring when I was an 8th grader at I.S. 230 in Councilmember Daniel Dromm's district and Generation Citizen's Community Change Fellowship during summer 2017 before beginning 9th grade this year.

Generation Citizen is an education program designed to get civics education into middle and high school classrooms in an action-oriented way and empower young leaders to exercise their civic duties and participate in civically engaged activities. As DeNora mentioned in her testimony, GC partners with schools to offer a twice weekly Action Civics class to educate middle and high school students about how to confront and take effective action to address community issues by engaging with politics.

Students start by debating what they would change if they were decision-makers in their school, their city, or their state. Then students build consensus to choose one issue impacting their community to focus on addressing collectively. The students analyze the underlying root cause(s) of the agreed upon issue and then collaborate to develop and execute an action plan, which may involve lobbying elected officials to advance legislative and/or policy solutions, or building a coalition. The program culminates with Civics Day, the end-of-semester student finale where students present their action projects at a science fair style exhibition event.

Fortunately, my 8th grade class at I.S. 230, in Councilmember Daniel Dromm's district, participated in the program, and we focused on breaking down the issue of racism, which is, may I add another term to define bullying. Of such a broad idea, bullying raises so many emotions and yet, so differing emotions. You say the word bullying, and each person you say it would give a different response in terms of emotion, tone, perspective, and personal attitude. Bullying hurts someone physically and mentally. I overcame bullying and my goal is to help people take control of their bullying situation too. A campaign is a great way, like many other organizations have done.

My class' action project dealt with racism, deepening the topic, our focus was hate crimes against Muslims and ways to report them. The main goal of the project was to help the victims of bullying based on religion resolve their encounters of harassment and prevent Muslims from fearing bullying. One of our tactics included setting up school-based workshops to educate students about the importance of the dialing 911, or what a hate crime is and how to come to terms with who you are. Given the importance of the topic, the school principal at I.S. 230 helped us set up the workshop and Councilmember Daniel Dromm supported our efforts.

As this project proceeded, I replayed my life during the school year and thought about the bullying I experienced. And to leave it like it is, rumors spread and the idea of giving up on what was so important it took a toll on me, to the extreme. "Mean girls" is an understatement. Girls that I didn't even know sent me glares from someone who could stoop so low to the point where I felt frustrated. I tried to rid myself of these bullies because I don't speak to them. But I realize, as much as I hated to say it and think it, these girls were once considered friends and to this day remain friends with some of the people I considered were the only friends I had. They, my friends told me what I know now, the harsh words of being called a radish, because I wore purple. Radish was my name and I embraced the idea of my purple sweater to my purple shoes to a radish. I tried to understand the pain they wanted to put me through, but with each daunting question came the reply, "let her be clueless."

After Civics Day ended, I remembered my civics teacher showed my class a documentary titled "The Bully." It centered around kids across the country, different ages and the bullying they faced in school that led them to committing suicide. Many people feel so beaten down by bullying that they consider ending their own life. The children from the documentary won't get their life back and the victims' families will suffer. Through the documentary, it inspired The BULLY Project, a movement to end bullying as the aftermath was shown in the documentary.

Fast forward to this past summer, I hid away, thinking that participating in GC's Community Change Fellowship (CCF) program would help me find my voice, to stop reasoning with injustice, and speak for the helpless. During the CCF program, I was given the opportunity to intern at Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), a city agency that mediates, investigates and prosecutes allegation of police misconduct. This experience reinforced the importance of educating people to know how to report misconduct or harassment regarding their race, religion, gender and sexuality, which I focused on in my class' action project. Rethinking what I learned in the civics program, I grew so passionate to help eliminate bullying and racial discrimination.

"The Bully" documentary, my bullying experience, the project I worked on with Generation Citizen, my internship at CCRB, and the CCF program, empowered me to keep breaking down these issues and all the aspects of bullying I've witnessed. Earlier I've stated that a campaign or a movement is an incredible way to reach out to people and provide support and one more voice to stop bullying. Now I stand to strive, as a better, stronger citizen of this great city.

Thank you all for this incredible opportunity to voice my concerns about a problem dear to my heart and mind. A special thank you to Generation Citizen for allowing me to expand on my ideas to benefit others who are not able to. Thank you so much to the Council Members and the community for listening to me. It takes a City to turn itself into a compassionate powerhouse.