

# Supporting legislation to include bullying in criminal code



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UNIT I

Aanii, Anishnaabek, before I launch into my article, I want to take a moment to say MIIGWETCH (thank you) for this beautiful year. It was one filled with many challenges, obstacles and great joy. We welcomed new members into our families, but also said farewell to others. Life is like that, tremendous joy, as well as pain. We are taught how precious each of us is, and to never take for granted the time we have together. I want to wish you all the joy of this holiday season, the love of family and all the good things the Creator has provided for us. Miino-niibaaniima – Merry Christmas.

Bullying is cruel. It is a perva-

sive problem that can have negative consequences for our tribal communities and for the right of our citizens to live in a safe environment *without fear*. Children suffer it in school, adults suffer in the workplace and it has spread virus-like throughout our nation, state and tribal communities through the use of the Internet. Sadly, suicide is on the rise, and bullying is fast becoming a reason why.

Bullying includes direct behaviors such as words, conduct, social media posting (cyber bullying), as well as indirect activities like spreading rumors and doing other things that cause a person physical or psychological intimidation. But it is not just the “target” of the bullying that suffers – those who stand by passively watching or actively encouraging bullying are also victims of these hostile acts. Bullying occurs in all forms, against all ages, and it must be stopped.

I am against bullying, and have written legislation for our tribe that not only establishes support for policies and procedures to address bullying in our communities, but also directs that it be established in our criminal code, with real consequences. By the time this article publishes, perhaps it will be known if six other members of the board of directors

feel as I do, and bullying will be unlawful in our tribe. Until that time when it becomes law, we must all do our part to “be a hero” to anyone we feel is being bullied.

One of the things we can all do, is to “step up.” We can teach our children what to do. We can educate ourselves on what to do. *Stopbullying.gov* is an excellent web resource that explains what is bullying, cyber bullying, how to respond to bullying, how to prevent bullying and how to get help. I have personally found that trying to stop bully-like behavior can be very challenging, but we must never give up! Over the course of my term as a member of the board of directors, I have seen numerous instances of what I consider bully-like behavior from the chairman of our tribe, and I am “stepping up” in this unit report to address it. It is unacceptable.

Speaking only for myself, as a member of the board of directors, as a mother, a grandmother and an Anishnaabe woman, I DO NOT condone the negative, untruthful, antagonistic, harsh, deceitful and bully-like actions and statements of Aaron Payment against anyone. Despite the good work he has done for our tribe, his behavior against many individuals including employees, trib-

al citizens, children and elders are unbecoming of his office, are his own, and do not reflect the opinion of the board of directors or the tribe. The board of directors has worked on this issue behind closed doors on numerous occasions and it has not worked. In fact, at our last attempt, Chairman Payment walked out of the meeting before it was even adjourned.

No one, least of all the members of the board, want our members or employees to feel threatened, bullied or harshly treated. Many members have felt we were condoning or accepting of this kind of behavior and that is absolutely untrue! We have simply run out of options available to the board at this time to try to stop the chairman from committing these cruel acts against our members. I will not add to the victims pain by giving an accounting or providing examples. The threats began with his election night speech, and have not stopped. One need only read his reports in our paper or look at the various Facebook groups where he posts to see how the intimidation occurs.

I am compelled to bring this issue to our people in hopes that, through member support, we can bring this bad behavior to an end, and move forward in a positive way. This is not about

fighting with the chairman. I have tried for over a year now, to set a good example by not giving his remarks an audience. I have always tried to respond to hurtful and untrue things said about me, with simple statements of truth. However, the negative behavior has extended beyond politics, and it is my duty to help protect the tribal members and others who are being targeted. The tribal anti-bullying law will hopefully be a deterrent to bullying and, if not, then at least it can provide real consequences for this reprehensible crime.

Victims of bullying need to know that there is someone who will step up — someone who will say, “This is not acceptable.” If you believe that bullying by anyone, INCLUDING ELECTED OFFICIALS is not acceptable, “Step up, be a hero.” Write, text, email or phone your unit director or your chairman, post it on your Facebook wall, tell everyone: ***Bullying in Indian Country is NOT OK. It is not our way.***

Working together, we can make bullying stop!

Anishnaabe gagige!  
(Anishnaabe for always).  
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