



DARRELL V. McGRAW, JR.
ATTORNEY GENERAL

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

PHYSICAL ADDRESS:
812 Quarrier Street, 2nd Floor
Charleston, West Virginia 25301

TELEPHONE NUMBER:
(304) 558-0546

TOLL FREE NUMBER:
(877) 421-5074

MAILING ADDRESS:
Post Office Box 1789
Charleston, West Virginia 25326-1789

FACSIMILE NUMBER:
(304) 558-0649

CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT

The Civil Rights Division of the West Virginia Attorney General's Office, in collaboration with individual high schools and middle schools throughout the state, has embarked on a program designed to increase the safety of students and to protect their learning environments by reducing bias-motivated harassment and violence. The project, which began in the Fall of 1999, is modeled after a program which has operated very successfully for several years by the Attorney General of Maine.

Experience has shown that serious civil rights violations involving teenagers typically have two common denominators. First, where violence occurs, it is usually preceded by months of lower level harassment generally beginning with racial, ethnic, sexual, religious and homophobic slurs. Second, school administrators are often not aware of the earlier harassment because minority victims typically do not pass on the information to the appropriate school personnel. The Civil Rights Team Project attempts to create a structure whereby the culture of intolerance and potential for violence which exists in many of our schools can be changed. The Project also seeks to create a mechanism through which minority students (or the friends of minority students) can alert someone of harassment before it escalates to the level of serious violence.

The civil rights team at each school consists of three students per grade, plus one or two faculty advisors. The teams attend an orientation program conducted by the Civil Rights Division of the Attorney General's Office, and then work throughout the school year to provide education and awareness on issues of bias and prejudice. Additionally, the teams create a mechanism by which students can provide information about harassment directly to team members. The teams have no responsibility with respect to discipline. Rather, when the teams learn of harassment, their responsibility is to pass the information on to the appropriate school or law enforcement authorities.

The Civil Rights Division also conducts an in-service training for the faculty and administrators of each of the participating schools. The three-hour training program is conducted by a two-person team which includes a staff attorney from the Civil Rights Division and an educator.



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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
CHARLESTON 25305

DARRELL V. MCGRAW, JR.
ATTORNEY GENERAL

(304) 558-2021
FAX (304) 558-0140

December 23, 2002

Mr. Kevin McCoy
AFA of West Virginia
P.O. Box 11752
Charleston, WV 25339

Dear Mr. McCoy:

This letter will memorialize our conference call of December 13, 2002, regarding the Civil Rights Team Project.

I have taken steps to complete a survey of any and all materials which have been utilized by the Attorney General's Office or in which the Attorney General's Office had a collaborative effort. Once the materials are received by me, they will be reviewed and any suggestion that the Hate Crimes Bill covers sexual orientation will be deleted. Further, any reference to resource groups which serve as a tool for gay rights advocacy will be deleted.

The theme of the Safe School Initiative should focus not on our differences but our common humanity and that we are more alike than we are different.

It is also my understanding that you or a representative of your group would like to be involved in the review of the materials. Once I have received all of the material, I will contact you so that we can begin this effort.

Very truly yours,


FRANCES A. HUGHES
CHIEF DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

FAH/jy



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ATTORNEY GENERAL

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FAX (304) 558-0140

January 16, 2003

Mr. Kevin McCoy
AFA of West Virginia
P.O. Box 11752
Charleston, WV 25339

Dear Mr. McCoy:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with the Attorney General's office this morning. We believe that the meeting was very productive and informative. We have also gained an appreciation for what you are trying to accomplish.

The Attorney General's office believes that we have the same objective—making sure that any child in a West Virginia school is safe.

The Attorney General's office believes that this matter should be resolved by the West Virginia State school board and members of the community should be involved in whatever direction the school board chooses. There appears to be a conflict in the communities as to the best approach to accomplish this laudable objective.

The Attorney General's office will no longer be doing the Civil Rights Team Project. If the school board believes that an anti-bullying initiative is appropriate, we would welcome the opportunity to be involved in a process where all parents and all concerns of the community are addressed.

We believe that a program designed to focus on the principle--*Do unto others as you would have others do unto you*--should gain the support of everyone interested in the issue of safe schools. Obviously, a program that has aroused so much controversy and objection is no longer useful and evidences deep divisions within the community as to what materials should be provided to children. That is why we believe that any anti-bullying initiative should be spearheaded by the Department of Education and should not focus on a particular class of victims but instead should adopt an approach which focuses on our common humanity.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frances A. Hughes".

FRANCES A. HUGHES
CHIEF DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

FAH/jy