

# Cyber-Bullying Protection Measure Proposed in Maryland

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A mother made an emotional plea to lawmakers in Annapolis Thursday, asking them to protect children and teenagers from cyber bullying.

She spoke from personal experience because her own daughter was a victim of online bullying.

In the state of Maryland, there is currently no law against online bullies creating fake MySpace pages. The mother who spoke in Annapolis Thursday said she, along with her eighth grade daughter, are afraid to show their faces.

"She was devastated," the mother explained. "She called me at work one day in tears, she called me and said there's a MySpace site up in my name. I pulled it up at work and I wanted to throw up."

Someone posing as the girl had put up a page that grossly misrepresented the honor roll student. "They portrayed her as crazy drunk, foul-mouthed, and promiscuous -- that's not my daughter," the mother said.

The bullying was real but so was the fact that Maryland law doesn't make cyber bullying a crime, even though a 2007 Pew study found 32 percent of teens who use the Internet say they've been harassed while on the computer.

Now, an Anne Arundel County legislator wants to expand Maryland law to allow the state to investigate and prosecute those who engage in cyber bullying.

The measure would protect people from harassment on message boards and networking Web sites like MySpace.

Republican Delegate Nic Kipke from Pasadena says online bullying is a "silent problem" that is blamed for suicides in Maryland and throughout the country.

There's a similar bill going through the Maryland Senate. Last year, the idea made it out of committee, but not through the session. This year, Del. Kipke hopes for enough votes to sign the bill into law.

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