



Addressing Harassment and Discrimination in our Schools: Nine Things Every STUDENT Should Know

- **You are not alone in your experiences of harassment.** Your feelings are valid. Our report documents similar experiences from students across the state of Maine. Research shows that the negative impact of these experiences is real.
- **As a student, you have a right to feel safe at secure and to get an education without being harassed or discriminated against.** Schools have a legal obligation to guarantee the physical and emotional safety of all students and to provide equal access to educational opportunities. If you are experiencing harassment, exclusion, or unfair treatment because of your race, religion, or national origin, it may be a violation of your rights.
- **Whenever possible, involve your parent or guardian to help address the problem.** We know that family dynamics can be complicated and there may be difficulty with having your parent or guardian advocate for your rights at school. But whenever possible, it can be helpful to involve your parent or guardian in documenting any abuse or harassment you experience at school and in talking to your school administrators.
- **There are people who can help in your school.** Trusted guidance counselors, teachers, or student leaders can give you support and help you access resources to resolve issues at school. Each school's systems of support may look different, but try to use whatever resources are available to you. Wherever you feel that your access to these resources has been limited, document that too.
- **There are also people outside of school who can help.** Each school must have a clear anti-bullying policy and a way for you to file a complaint. But if advocating inside your school isn't working, there are ways to advocate for yourself outside of school. Your local school board should have a complaint process. And the Maine Human Rights Commission was set up by the government to investigate complaints about discrimination. Information about how to request help is online:
www.aclumaine.org/webelonghere

- **You don't have to meet with the administration alone.** You can bring a parent, a guardian, a relative, or some other adult you trust. You may even be able to bring another student. Having someone with you in the meeting may make you feel more comfortable, and it will also help you remember all that was said and done in the meeting.
- **Outreach to school boards can be especially important.** The school board is supposed to seek public input in policy and decision-making, and many school boards allow for public comment during meetings. Alternatively, many school boards encourage communications like emails or telephone calls for feedback about policy. School board meetings are open to the public, and the time and agenda of meetings must be posted online. If you decide to speak at a school board meeting, don't be afraid. Try to prepare ahead of time by practicing what you will say. Whenever there's an opportunity, participate!
- **You have the right to speak up and to advocate for yourself and others.** There are specific rules governing free speech and assembly at school, but in general you have the right to speak up for yourself and to gather with other students who agree with you.
- **It takes an entire community to make change.** There are many organizations who are advocating for the rights of parents and students, including the ACLU of Maine. You can see a list online: www.aclumaine.org/webelonghere. Don't hesitate to reach out.

For more information, go to www.aclumaine.org/webelonghere.