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U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
Peer-To-Peer Violence and Bullying: Examining the Federal Response

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Dear Chairman Castro and Commissioners:

I laude the Commission on the very important topic of peer-to-peer violence related to sexual orientation.

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh. My research has focused on defining and measuring adolescent sexual orientation; the relationship between gender-role nonconformity, bullying, and suicidality among gay youth; and childhood and adolescent antecedents of adult health problems among gay males. I am in the final year of a K01 Mentored Research Scientist Development Award (funded by the National Institute of Mental Health) to develop strategies to implement online health promotion interventions targeting gay youth.

I am writing to inform the Commission of research that I have conducted research that is pertinent to your discussion of the scope of the problem of peer-to-peer violence. In particular I would like to comment on some testimony in your May 13, 2011 hearing that stated that the evidence on peer-to-peer violence is lacking or insufficient or unreliable, for example for its reliance on nonprobability samples such as the often referred to GLSEN report. In this letter I describe only research that did not rely on such samples.

Our research, using state of the art methodology, has confirmed that bullying victimization of sexual minority youth (i.e., youth who are sexually attracted to same-sex youth, self-labeled as gay, lesbian or bisexual) is a major public health problem. This research is *in press* and will be published shortly in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the premier international journal addressing public health issues.

We conducted a meta-analysis—a statistical approach to aggregate data from numerous independently conducted studies—to assess the scope of peer victimization among sexual minority youth in North America. Our analysis included only studies that compared sexual minority and sexual non-minority (heterosexual) youth. In addition to peer-to-peer victimization we assessed childhood sexual abuse and physical abuse perpetrated by parents or guardians.

Of major importance, we included in our analysis *only* school-based studies that used probability (sometimes referred to as random) samples of youth. That is, youth assessed in these studies represent the populations of youth attending high schools in the communities where the studies were conducted.

Our findings were overwhelming. Over the aggregate of *all* the studies that qualified to be included in the meta analysis, compared to heterosexual youth,

- Sexual minority youth were 170% more likely to be assaulted at school and 240% more likely to miss school due to fear that they would be unsafe at school or on your way to or from school¹.
- Of note, an astounding 40% of lesbians 44% of bisexual females, 43% of gay males and 50% of bisexual males were assaulted at school while 16% of lesbian females, 23% of bisexual females, 14% of gay males and 23% of bisexual males missed school due to fear.

These results are based on 27 surveys administered in 15 geographic areas including cities, regions, or entire states such as Boulder, CO; Chicago, IL; Dane County, WI; District of Columbia; Massachusetts; Milwaukee, WI; Minnesota; Rhode Island; Seattle, WA; Vermont; Wisconsin., Of these 27 surveys, 17 were implemented after year 2000 and 10 during the 1990's.

The studies referred to include the following:

Boulder Valley School District. Section 2: Results by Sexual Orientation - 2003. Accessed on January 8, 2010.

Center for Health Data and Analysis School-Based Health Surveys. Personal Communication - Received data about RI YRBS, March 15, 2010.

Chicago Department of Health. Personal Communication, Received data about YRBS on March 1, 2010

District of Columbia Public Schools HIV/AIDS Education Program. Personal communication - Received data about YRBS on Feb. 27, 2010 and District of Columbia Public Schools HIV/AIDS Education Program. Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Sexual minority baseline fact sheet In: <http://mhfaengland.org/viewdocument.php?action=viewdox&pid=0&doc=38195&grp=443>; Downloaded December 8, 2009.

Espelage DL, Aragon SR, Birkett M, Koenig BW. Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influence do parents and schools have? *School Psychology Review* 2008;37(2):202-216.

Faulkner AH, Cranston K. Correlates of same-sex sexual behavior in a random sample of Massachusetts high school students. *AJPH* 1998;88(2):262-266.

Goodenow C, Szalacha L, Westheimer K. School support groups, other school factors, and the safety of sexual minority adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools* 2006;43(5):573-589.

Goodenow C. Personal communication - Received data about 2003, 2005, 2007 MA YRBS September 20, 2010.

Gruber JE, Fineran S. Comparing the impact of bullying and sexual harassment victimization on the mental and physical health of adolescents. *Sex Roles* 2008;59:1-13.

Milwaukee Public School System. Personal Communication - Received data about 2005 YRBS on March 10, 2010.

Potat VP, Aragon SR, Espelage DL, Koenig BW. Psychosocial concerns of sexual minority youth: Complexity and caution in group differences. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 2009;77(1):196-201.

¹ In most cases, the questions being answered by youth with respect to these two statistics were "During the past 12 months, how many times has someone threatened or injured you with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property?" and "During the past 30 days, on how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on your way to or from school?" respectively.

Robin L, Brener ND, Donahue SF, Hack T, Hale K, Goodenow C. Associations between health risk behaviors and opposite-, same-, and both-sex sexual partners in representative samples of Vermont and Massachusetts high school students. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine* 2002;156:349-355.

Saewyc EM, Skay CL, Pettingell SL, Reis EA, Bearinger LH, Resnick MD, et al. Hazards of stigma: The sexual and physical abuse of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents in the United States and Canada. *Child Welfare* 2006;85:195-213.

Saewyc EM. Personal communication - Received data about British Columbia, 2003, 2008; MN, 2001, 2004, 2007; VT, 2005, 2007 on March 22, 2010.

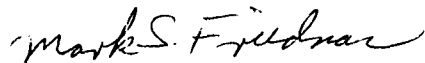
Wisconsin Division of Public Health in Collaboration with Diverse and Resilient Inc. Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) 2007 - Risk behaviors and factors of youth engaging in same-sex sexual behaviors. Wisconsin Division of Public Health 2009.

Williams T, Connolly J, Pepler D, Craig W. Questioning and sexual minority adolescents: high school experiences of bullying, sexual harassment and physical abuse. *Can J Commun Ment Health*. 2003;22(2):47-57.

Williams T, Connolly J, Pepler D, Craig W. Peer victimization, social support, and psychosocial adjustment of sexual minority adolescents. *J Youth Adolesc*. 2005;34(5):471-482.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark S. Friedman".

Mark S. Friedman, Ph.D., MPA, MSW
Assistant Professor