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The word “threat” appears constantly in our national and international dialogue. Whether attached to terrorism, cyber, or even the weather, the word “threat” had become a catchall to mean potential danger. The overuse of this term can delude it’s meaning, unless one works in law enforcement. A criminal threat must always be taken seriously, especially if that threat involves our schools and children. There is never the luxury of compliancy when assessing threats of violence at school.

Though we navigate a world where our children are becoming increasingly more comfortable using technology to communicate (and many times leaving the rest of us trying to catch up), we must begin a dialogue with each other, and with our children, on how we protect our treasured First Amendment at the same time protecting our children while they are in school. Threats of violence are not considered protected speech. We have all heard the adage that our right to free speech does not mean we can yell “fire” in a crowded theater.

Historically, school officials have dealt with threats administratively, by suspending or expelling the perpetrator. Though this may be effective in some cases, in other incidents it is imperative that law enforcement has a larger role in this type of scenario.

State Sen. Jean Fuller is facing this issue head-on with Senate Bill (SB) 110, which would make it a misdemeanor to make a threat of violence to a school through an electronic act, such as social media, email or texting, if the threat is likely to interfere with the activities of a campus or facility.

Though the majority of threats against students and schools prove to be hoaxes, law enforcement and school officials can never bet on that. The resources necessary to cancel classes, close buildings, and investigate threats are tremendous, not to mention the toll a threat takes on the student and faculty’s time, well-being and loss of instruction.

Whether the suspect making the threat may have only wanted to avoid a test, or had a more sinister motive, the disruption and drain on resources is unavoidable. To that end, SB 110 would give law enforcement the tools necessary to arrest and prosecute offenders. Students and faculty are owed safety. A threat looms over a

learning environment like an insidious vapor. As parents, as citizens, we must ensure our schools are protected.

Older generations lamenting about younger generations is certainly not new. However, there has never been a generational divide created by covert communication like we have today. Please look at your children's cell phone applications. Burnbook, Afterschool, Yikyak, and Kik are the type of apps that allow people to communicate anonymously. Threats and bullying exist best in a world where the sender is unknown. Ask your child why he or she needs an app that guarantees an avoidance of responsibility. We cannot attack the technology; we have to talk about how to wisely and responsibly use that technology.

Please join me in support of Sen. Fuller and her quest to keep our children and our schools safe. Let's continue to talk about the challenges we face in a world where communication is faster and easier, but also more dangerous and anonymous.

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