



# OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Catherine Cortez Masto, *Attorney General*

100 N. Carson Street  
Carson City, Nevada 89701-4717  
Telephone - (775) 684-1100  
Fax - (775) 684-1108  
Web - <http://ag.state.nv.us>

**CONTACT: Edie Cartwright  
775.684.1189**

## **SB 163 FIGHTS CYBER BULLYING By Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto**

The increasing use of computers and ipods has led to a new form of bullying known as cyber bullying.

This new form of bullying is quite powerful. Through the use of technology, bullies can send cruel e-mail messages, threaten others in chat rooms, create web sites to damage reputations or exchange embarrassing photos with cell phone cameras.

Some things about bullying have not changed. Bullying still hurts. It creates an unhealthy atmosphere in the classroom and prevents an environment where learning – both intellectual and social – can take place.

Students who are bullied often are fearful of attending school or using school restrooms, have difficulty focusing on schoolwork and often have physical symptoms including headaches, stomachaches or depression.

It not only affects the child who is being bullied, it affects the young people who witness the act and poisons the atmosphere of the classroom, schoolyard or playground where the bullying takes place. In fact, bullying ultimately hurts the bully as well.

Students who bully like to be in charge, often lack empathy for others and have difficulty obeying rules. These students are more likely to smoke or use alcohol; skip or drop out of school and may be convicted of crimes as young adults.

This new form of bullying can be anonymous and the results can be tragic. In Missouri, a 13 year old girl committed suicide after being the target of cruel cyber bullying. Megan Meier developed a relationship on MySpace with an individual who she thought was a new boy in the area, but in fact, was a cabal of adults who created an elaborate hoax leading Megan to believe that she had a

burgeoning relationship with the boy. When the plot was revealed, Megan was unable to deal with the humiliation and took her own life.

The Nevada Tech Crime Advisory Board, which I Chair, crafted legislation to address cyber bullying. Senator Valerie Wiener and Assemblywoman Bonnie Parnell then successfully sponsored Senate Bill 163 to ensure safe and respectful learning environments in public schools which included a prohibition on bullying and cyber-bullying.

The act requires courses of study in computer education and technology to include a policy for ethical, safe and secure use of computers and other electronic devices and specifically prohibits cyber bullying. SB 163 states “the use of the Internet by pupils in a manner that is ethical, safe and secure is essential to a safe and respectful learning environment and is essential for the successful use of technology.”

The bill has provisions requiring administrators, principals, teachers and other personnel to not tolerate bullying, cyber bullying, harassment or intimidation. It requires all school districts and public schools to provide a safe and respectful learning environment free of cyber bullying. It also requires training for administrative personnel on bullying and cyber bullying and provides instructions on dealing with violations both by school employees who fail to enforce the statute and pupils who engage in bullying and cyber bullying.

The use of technology plays a vital role in the education of Nevada’s youth. SB 163 places safeguards in the use of that technology to assure that the learning environment is safe, ethical and respectful, enabling our students to become mature, productive adults.