

Good evening Chairman Sawyers, board members, Dr. Walts. My name is Gwen Edwards and my address is on file.

This evening, PWEA has been addressing concerns of workplace bullying and the unprofessional treatment of employees. Further there is the fear of retribution when coming forward to share their experiences. To alleviate these feelings and fears, a safe confidential system to report incidents of workplace bullying, harassment, and any other unprofessional treatment must be in place.

Prince William County Schools, under the Department of Human Resources, houses the Office of Equity and Employee Relations. The description of this department, quoted from the PWCS website, states: "The Office of Equity and Employee Relations advises and guides the PWCS community on policies, regulations, and practices related to compliance issues. Additionally, the Office of Equity and Employee Relations ensures that an equal and diverse PWCS community is available to all qualified

individuals on a nondiscriminatory and non-harassment basis.

Is the Office of Equity and Employee Relations effective when it housed under the Department of Human Resources?

This is the reason why PWEA has serious concerns with the effectiveness of the Office of Equity and Employee Relations for a variety of reasons. This office has one staff member, who also handles complaints and mediation. This is a conflict of interest because that one staff member that handles mediation should be impartial and a failure to be impartial to both parties which could lead to one of the parties to file a complaint against the other party. Also, HR makes the final decision as to whether or not to move the complaint to the office of risk management. The outcome rarely is upheld in the favor employee making the complaint.

Employees are sometimes persuaded not to file a complaint at all. The response from the Office of Equity and Employee Relations is often slow. At the end of the investigation of the complaint, the complainant doesn't receive a copy of the summary, where's the due process for the complainant? Where's the appeal process for the complainant? Instead, the complainant is often returned to the same worksite with the Administrator or Supervisor or colleague with the bully, harasser.

All Employees need and deserve a fair process to file a complaint. We are asking you to remove the office of Employee Relations from under HR, hire an outside agency to deal with the complaints, so that equity and fairness will be in place.

It is time for PWCS to implement a safe and confidential system.