

# THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION RELEASES REPORT ON PEER-TO-PEER VIOLENCE AND BULLYING, EXAMINING THE FEDERAL RESPONSE**

**WASHINGTON, DC** - The United States Commission on Civil Rights announces that it has released its report, *Peer-to-Peer Violence and Bullying, Examining the Federal Response*, pursuant to Public Law 103-419. The purpose of the report is to examine the role played by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice in addressing peer-to-peer discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, religion, disability, sex and/or LGBT status.

Commission Chairman Martin R. Castro stated, “Every one of us has children in our lives that we love and care about, and we want those children to have safe, happy, and long lives in which they reach their full potential. I believe each of us, regardless of our party affiliation or our political ideology, wants to have communities and schools that are safe for our children, regardless of their race, national origin, sex, religion, disability status or sexual orientation. I hope that this report is viewed as a constructive contribution to the discussion on how our Constitution and laws do protect and should better protect the most vulnerable among us---our children.”

The Commission gathered enforcement data from the Departments of Education and Justice and convened a day-long briefing with twenty speakers who included current and former federal government officials, academics, and representatives from a diverse set of advocacy organizations. In addition, the Commission received numerous written submissions from the public, academics and advocacy organizations.

Based on the evidence gathered the Commission concluded that despite the harm caused by peer-to-peer bullying and harassment on account of a student’s race, national origin, religion, disability, sex and/or sexual orientation, current federal laws (and the laws of many states) do not fully protect all students from such bullying and harassment.

Specifically, the Commission’s findings are:

1. Bullying and harassment, including bullying and harassment based on sex, race, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or religion, are harmful to American youth.
2. Current federal civil rights laws do not provide the U.S. Department of Education with jurisdiction to protect students from peer-to-peer harassment that is solely on the basis of religion.
3. The current federal civil rights laws do not protect students from peer-to-peer harassment that is solely on the basis of sexual orientation.

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To better record the incidence of harassment based solely on sexual orientation or solely on religion, the Commission recommends that the Departments of Education and Justice adopt more detailed tracking methods regarding the complaints they receive. To better assist state and local officials to comply with their responsibilities under federal law, the Commission recommends that the Department of Education strive to use consistent language throughout its public statements and documents and provide concrete examples in guidance documents that it produces. A copy of the report may be obtained on the Commission's website, [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov).

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*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Martin Castro and Commissioners Roberta Achtenberg, Todd Gaziano, Gail Heriot, Peter Kirsanow, David Kladney, Abigail Thernstrom, and Michael Yaki. Commission meetings and briefings are open to the general public. The Commission's website is <http://www.usccr.gov>.*