

**William C. Thompson, Jr.
New York City Comptroller**

**Testimony before the Committee on Education
New York City Council**

Presented by Sara C. Kay, Director, Office of Policy Management

Intro No. 188

**A Local Law to amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York, in relation
to prohibiting acts of harassment in schools**

**April 26, 2004
10:00 am**

Good morning, Chairperson Moskowitz and members of the Committee on Education. I am pleased to offer testimony this morning on behalf of New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr. in support of Intro. No.188. This Bill seeks to amend the City's Administrative Code to prohibit harassment of students, teachers, administrators and others in the City's schools on the basis of a variety of different traits, including a person's ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender.

If signed into law, this bill will send a powerful message of tolerance to all New Yorkers. Its fundamental premise, applied in this instance to the City's schools, is that harassment is wrong because it robs individuals of their basic dignity and may result in unequal treatment and discrimination. In schools, it contributes to a hostile environment that can threaten student safety, interfere with learning and prevent students from fulfilling their long term potential. Harassment breeds fear, intolerance and even hatred, from which we have a fundamental obligation to protect our City's children.

In the challenge to attain high academic standards, it is easy to lose sight of the profound social education that also occurs in our schools. As they interact with their teachers and other students, children learn important lessons about how people should

treat one another. We can recognize this social dimension – and ensure that everyone involved has the tools they need to set a high standard for social behavior – or we can ignore this responsibility and risk behavior that falls to the lowest common denominator.

Intro.188 is one tool we can give teachers, school administrators and students to encourage the best possible social education for our City’s children. The bill requires training and dissemination of educational materials throughout the schools, which puts the weight of the school system behind a standard for behavior that prohibits harassment. It also directs the Chancellor to devise an appropriate penalty structure that protects victims of harassment and insulates those making good faith reports of harassment from civil damages. Significantly, this bill also provides for the tracking of incidents of harassment as well as an annual statistical report of such incidents system-wide. This provision will have the important effect of exposing incidents of harassment and ensuring the public scrutiny that will create additional incentives to reduce it.

As the former President of the City’s Board of Education and now as the City’s Comptroller, Comptroller Thompson is strongly committed to ridding our schools of all forms of intolerance. Accordingly, we urge the City Council to approve Intro. 188.