



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### PARENT DRESS CODES AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

I have been fascinated by a piece of legislation being suggested by Tennessee Representative Antonio Parkinson on a parental dress code. We should welcome the discussion. The legislation is probably not necessary. It offers nothing that law enforcement could not already do.

Apparently in Memphis-Shelby County, parents are going on school grounds dressed in inappropriate attire, or as Rep. Parkinson describes one case: “a parent coming in with lingerie on and body parts still visible to everyone.” We can all agree that is inappropriate. Here is the problem: we already have laws on the books designed to address public indecency for adults. In Tennessee, individuals commit “indecent exposure” when he or she, in a public place or on the private premises of another, intentionally exposes his or her genitals or buttocks or engages in sexual acts and reasonably expects the acts to be viewed by others. The acts offend an ordinary viewer, and are for the arousal and gratification of the individual.

An individual can also be charged with indecent exposure if he or she knowingly engages in sexual acts in his or her own residence, in the presence of a child, for the purpose of sexual arousal ([Tennessee Code Annotated §39-13-511](#)). The punishment for public indecency or indecent exposure includes fines and/or jail time. For the first or second offense, public indecency is a Class B misdemeanor punishable by a fine of \$500. If you are convicted of three or more indecent exposure charges, you will have to register as a sex offender. If you are a school employee or an adult on school grounds and witness another adult engaged in indecent exposure please notify school administration, the appropriate law enforcement agency, including the school resource officer, immediately. Passing legislation is probably not necessary, if we simply enforce the indecent exposure laws already on the books.

Engaged parents are critical partners in student success. But we must expect adults to follow local, state and federal laws. This would also include appropriate behavior. Tennessee law already prohibits a variety of behaviors that annoy or disrupt other people in public. These categories of offenses found in [Title 39 of the Tennessee Code Annotated \(T.C.A.\)](#): general offenses, offenses against the person, offenses against property, offenses against the family, offenses against the administration of government, and offenses against the public health, safety and welfare were revised and modernized in 1989. Perhaps they should be updated?

Violations of public peace and safety in Tennessee include: 1) Public intoxication: Appearing under the influence of alcohol or drugs, causing unreasonable annoyance or endangerment; 2) Disorderly conduct: Threatening behavior, creating hazardous conditions, being unreasonably noisy or fighting; 3) Civil rights intimidation: Threatening or injuring someone to prevent him or her from exercising rights or privileges; and, 4) Obstructing

#### SUMMARY

*Public indecency and conduct laws already exist for adults, and should not be the purview or responsibility of school officials.*

a passageway: Obstructing a sidewalk, highway, hallway or elevator. If parents are engaged in any of these behaviors, then it is a matter for law enforcement. Our schools have a difficult enough time managing the behavior issues of students. Managing the criminal behavior of adults is the primary role and responsibility of law enforcement.

The 111<sup>th</sup> General Assembly must address real issues facing all of our public schools. We should focus on three major priorities: 1) Strengthening the foundations of a quality system; 2) Getting our students ready to enter the workforce; and 3) Embracing innovation. I applaud Representative Parkinson for speaking up on an issue that is impacting the schools in his district. I hope he will encourage school officials in his district to work with law enforcement and address criminal behavior. We must have high moral standards in our schools. So, let's simply enforce the law that already exists. On that we can all agree.

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