

TESTIMONY OF JOSIE ANDREWS
Committee on Education and Labor
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My name is Josie Andrews. I am the writer of the screenplay and music of "Milo J High," an upcoming musical movie about bullying. I wrote the screenplay and all ten songs for the movie, with help from my sister Jackie as a coauthor of two songs.

I wrote Milo J High because bullying has become an extremely important issue for kids and teens. Almost everyone goes through it in some form. Some kids experience bullying as a victim, being tormented physically and emotionally. Victims sometimes seem to be victims because they can't or won't stand up for themselves, but bullying is not the fault of the victim. Very often when victims attempt to stand up for themselves, they are attacked verbally and physically and they suffer terrible consequences. There is always a ring leader who initiates the bullying of the victim. Bullies aren't necessarily always the boy who is bigger than all the other kids and takes peoples' lunch money. The bully can also be the girl who makes mean comments about and to everyone and seems to get away with it and still be very popular. But I don't think either of these two classifications of kids is the most important when we try to understand bullying. I think the people who play the most important part in bullying are the bystanders-- the ninety-nine percent of the kids who know that bullying is wrong but who don't do anything about it. Those are the kids who can make the difference.-and these kids are my target audience in Milo J High.

In most anti bullying programs I've seen go through my school, the bully always gets caught in the end, or realizes what they're doing is wrong, or the victim all of the sudden overthrows the bully or tells an adult who solves the problem. These approaches almost never work in real life. The victim is a victim because they can't stand up for themselves by themselves and no one ever helps them. A lot of bystanders in a bullying situation will say "I'm staying out of this" making parents and teachers proud of how they avoid drama. In reality, their non-involvement is what is *increasing* the problem. By doing nothing when you know something is wrong, you are making the problem a lot worse. A lot of kids don't want to say anything to the bully because they are friends with the bully and don't want to lose their popularity.

The story of the bystanders is the key to the story of. "Milo J High." The main character is an eighth grader named Josie. Josie's really a nice person, but she's in the popular group and one of the bully (Bryce's) best friends. When an overweight new girl, Wendy, moves to town, all she is looking for is to make a friend. She tries to befriend the popular girls who bluntly blow her off. When Wendy is persistent at trying to become friends with the "it girls," they start targeting and aggressively making fun of her. When a popular girl named Kay starts to feel bad and tries to be nice to Wendy, she loses all of the popular girls as friends. Josie is too scared after seeing what happened to Kay to stand up for Wendy, so she starts instant messaging her through a restricted screen name as her secret friend, signing off with her signature "xoxo pink." Wendy carries the print- outs of these conversations around at school like her only friend and when the

popular girls discover Josie's signature at the bottom, they are outraged because she's betrayed them and they decide that Josie deserves pay back. They tell Wendy that her secret friend is Josie and that Josie's messages were just part of a cruel joke. Wendy is very saddened by this news, and almost commits suicide until Josie promises her it's not a joke and that she will show Wendy her true friendship at the dance that night. Josie befriends every kid who has ever been bullied by the popular clique and walks into the dance to see her conversations with Wendy projected on the walls—but she also realizes that half of the conversations weren't from her. To everyone's surprise, it turned out a lot of kids, even some of the popular ones, had also been Wendy's secret friends. They were all afraid to be her friend publicly for the same reason Josie was afraid. But when Josie stands up for Wendy, all the other bystanders join in, stand up, and tell the bully that her power over them is gone.

If one person tries to stand up, they will be crushed just like the victim. But when that 99 percent of the school who knows bullying is wrong stands together for what is right, the bully doesn't have a fighting chance. Bullying can start as someone making a hurtful comment and build to emotional scars for life or even murder or suicide. Bullying continues because the victims feel like they are alone. If the bystanders do what's right, even if that risks popularity, or losing friends who weren't even real friends, everyone will realize that they're never alone. That is the message of Milo J High and that is the basis of the work my sister and I have done together in our anti-bullying campaign.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.