

**Testimony Regarding**

**S.B. 98: An Act Establishing Standards for Public School Security Personnel**

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Committee on Public Safety and Security

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Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

**Connecticut Voices for Children supports S.B. 98, which authorizes the Police Officer Standards and Training Council, in consultation with the Department of Education, to “establish standards for and provide training to security personnel employed in the public schools.” However, we urge significant additions to the proposed bill, which in current form mandates only that such trainings include “drug detection and gang identification.” We recommend broadening the scope of trainings to ensure that security personnel are adequately prepared to work appropriately and effectively with all of Connecticut’s schoolchildren. Our recommendations are as follows:**

- (1) Trainings should encompass a broad variety of critical skills in working with children in school settings, beyond “drug detection and gang identification.”
- (2) Trainings should emphasize responding appropriately, and without bias, to disciplinary infractions.
- (3) Trainings should include lessons on working with children exhibiting mental or behavioral health needs and connecting them to appropriate services.
- (4) The state should consider legislating other best practices for school security personnel, including performance and evaluation monitoring, regular in-service trainings, and consistent supervision.

**First, trainings should encompass a broad variety of critical skills in working with children in school settings, beyond “drug detection and gang identification.”** The Department of Justice recommends that “Pre-service training should focus on helping SROs to (1) teach; (2) mentor and counsel; (3) work collaboratively with school administrators; (4) manage their time; and (5) apply juvenile laws and case law.”<sup>1</sup> Newly released guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education additionally emphasize that “Training for school-based law enforcement should also address such topics as basic childhood and adolescent development, age-appropriate responses, disability issues, and conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques. Other necessary topics are bias-free policing (including implicit or unconscious bias and cultural competence), restorative justice practices, and how to identify and refer for services those students exposed to trauma and violence.”<sup>2</sup> Expanding training beyond “drug detection and gang identification” will help ensure that all personnel working with children are specifically trained in understanding and responding appropriately to adolescent behavior.

**Second, trainings should emphasize responding appropriately, and without bias, to disciplinary infractions.**<sup>3</sup> National data suggests that the presence of police in schools coincides with increasing arrests of students, a majority of which are for minor infractions.<sup>4</sup> Without adequate training, we are concerned that this trend could accelerate, with dire consequences for students in poorer communities, students of color, and students with disabilities – often the very same students who already face achievement gaps and other barriers to successful learning.<sup>5</sup>

During the 2012-2013 school year, almost 2,400 arrests occurred in Connecticut schools, almost one in ten of which resulted from “school policy violations” – low level offenses such as profanity, skipping class or detention, disrespect, and disruptive behavior.<sup>6</sup> Research also shows pervasive and disturbing disproportionality in exclusionary discipline practices and school arrests in Connecticut.<sup>7</sup> Students of color, students with special needs, and students from poorer school districts are all significantly more likely to be arrested.<sup>8</sup> In addition to training on this issue, we recommend that the state pass legislation requiring all school districts with police presence create and sign memorandums of agreement (MOA) between the schools and the police department that delineate the roles and responsibilities of teachers, administrators, other schools staff, and police officers in emergency situations and for daily activities.<sup>9</sup>

**Third, school security personnel should be trained in working with children exhibiting mental or behavioral health needs and connecting them to appropriate services** – aligning with the recommendations in Connecticut Public Act 13-178, which states school resource officers should be trained in “nationally-recognized best practices to prevent students with mental health issues from being victimized or disproportionately referred to the juvenile justice system as a result of their mental health issues.”<sup>10</sup> Approximately 80,000 school-aged children with diagnosable mental illness in Connecticut (about 75% of all children exhibiting such needs) do not access the services they need.<sup>11</sup> Training should ensure all security personnel know how to access and appropriately utilize student supports in school and in the community. These supports include alternatives to arrest, such as Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS), along with other community resources (particularly mental health, counseling, and substance abuse services) available to students who they believe may have unmet needs, or are in crisis situations. Security personnel should also be trained in implementing programs, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), that proactively intervene with at-risk students and promote positive behaviors in addition to fairly punishing misbehavior.<sup>12</sup>

**Finally, in addition to the more comprehensive training as outlined above, the state should consider legislating other best practices for school security personnel, including, but not limited to:**

- **Performance monitoring and evaluation**, including collecting and publishing an annual assessment of the security program with special attention on school-based arrest data.<sup>13</sup>
- **Regular in-service trainings**, providing periodic refresher courses with the most up-to-date information on relevant topics and opportunities for advanced trainings.<sup>14</sup>
- **Consistent and close supervision of school security personnel.**<sup>15</sup>

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions now or at your convenience.

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<sup>1</sup> “A Guide to Developing, Maintaining, and Succeeding with Your School Resource Officer Program,” U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, available at: [http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/ric/CDROMs/SchoolSafety/Law\\_Enforcement/AGuidetoDevelopingMaintainingSucceeding.pdf](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/ric/CDROMs/SchoolSafety/Law_Enforcement/AGuidetoDevelopingMaintainingSucceeding.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Education “Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline,” (January 2014), available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, “Officers should be trained on how to distinguish between, and appropriately respond to, disciplinary infractions appropriately handled by school officials on the one hand, and major threats to safety or serious criminal conduct that requires law enforcement on the other.”

<sup>4</sup> “Putting Armed Guards in Schools is Wrong Answer” The Advancement Project (January 2013): <http://www.advancementproject.org/blog/entry/putting-armed-guards-in-school-is-wrong-answer>.

<sup>5</sup> For earlier data and a comprehensive review of student arrests (and disproportionality in arrests) in Connecticut from 2007-2011, see Sarah Esty, “Arresting Development: Student Arrests in Connecticut,” Connecticut Voices for Children (September 2013), available at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/arresting-development-student-arrests-connecticut>.

<sup>6</sup> See Edie Joseph, “Student Arrests in Connecticut,” Connecticut Voices for Children (forthcoming, Spring 2014), on file at Connecticut Voices for Children. For earlier data and a comprehensive review of student arrests in Connecticut from 2007-2011, see Sarah Esty, “Arresting Development: Student Arrests in Connecticut,” Connecticut Voices for Children (September 2013), available at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/arresting-development-student-arrests-connecticut>.

<sup>7</sup> See Sarah Esty, “Testimony Regarding School Safety,” Connecticut Voices for Children (January 2013), available at: [http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/012513\\_sandyhooktaskforce\\_schoolsafety.pdf](http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/012513_sandyhooktaskforce_schoolsafety.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*. Also see Sarah Esty, “Arresting Development: Student Arrests in Connecticut,” Connecticut Voices for Children (September 2013), available at: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/arresting-development-student-arrests-connecticut>.

<sup>9</sup> A sample MOA and graduated response model can be found on the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee’s website: [http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/cjppd/cjjyd/programschoolpolice/moa\\_6-11.doc](http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/cjppd/cjjyd/programschoolpolice/moa_6-11.doc).

<sup>10</sup> See Connecticut General Assembly PA 13-178 “An Act Concerning the Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health of Youths,” available at: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/act/pa/pdf/2013PA-00178-R00SB-00972-PA.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> See “The SBDI Toolkit: A Community Resource for Reducing School-Based Arrests,” Connecticut Health and Development Institute, (September 2013), available at: <http://www.chdi.org/SchoolToolkit>.

<sup>12</sup> For more concrete tips on mental and behavioral health resources, see “The SBDI Toolkit.”

<sup>13</sup> “Hard Lessons: School Resource Officer Programs and School-Based Arrests in Three Connecticut Towns,” American Civil Liberties Union, (November 2008), available at: [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/racialjustice/hardlessons\\_november2008.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/racialjustice/hardlessons_november2008.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Finn and Jack McDevitt, “National Assessment of School Resource Officer Programs Final Project Report,” funded by U.S. Department of Justice, (March 2005), available at: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/209273.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, page 45: “Most programs fail to provide consistent or close supervision of the SROs’ work. However, adequate supervision of SROs is important to make sure the officers are working to their full potential and are not experiencing unreported or unacknowledged problems. Typically, programs require SROs to complete monthly activity logs and meet once a year with the supervisor. In some programs, supervisors periodically visit SROs and school administrators at the schools and observe the officers teach.”