

PEOPLE AGAINST INJUSTICE
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Testimony on behalf of HB 5780 An Act Concerning Safe Schools

We don't want children to use addictive drugs. We don't want adults to sell drugs to them. The 1500 feet law was supposed to protect children. But the effect of it is quite different; this law is not only unfair but also unnecessary. To begin with, it discriminates against those who live in urban areas, such as New Haven, where almost everywhere in the city is within 1500 feet of a school, day care or public housing. Secondly, children are not the principle targets of drug sellers. People of all ages who want drugs go after them and can get them. They are not stopped by the 1500 feet law. But the law is misused in any case; people are charged under it when school and day care are not even in use—at night and on weekends. In the third place, this tacked-on mandatory minimum charge is being used, not for its intended purpose, but mainly as a tool to coerce plea bargains from defendants—on the promise of *dropping* the 1500 feet charge.

If we are really interested in protecting children, we should at least make this extra charge realistic. The “drug free zones” should be clearly marked at 200 feet around the schools, day cares and public housing, where anyone who is dealing drugs can *see* that they are near these places.

If Legislators are really interested in reducing drug use and sales, they will put more attention toward understanding why people want to use and sell, and less attention toward just locking people up, which has accomplished little. After years of the “drug war”, illegal substances are as abundant as ever. Locking users up and then offering meaningful drug treatment to only a fraction of those who need it—that is poor policy.

Let's at least start with passing a Safe Schools bill that restores the original intention of the legislation.

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