

To: Judiciary Committee
From: Michael Giannelli, Concerned Citizen
Re: Senate Bill 687, AN ACT CONCERNING AUTOMATIC EXTERNAL DEFIBRILLATORS
Date: March 14, 2008

Good morning, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. On behalf my family and all the families of our extended communities of Norwich CT, I would like to thank you for addressing the issue of Automated External Defibrillators. While we all appreciate the Committee for raising the bill, I would be remiss not to raise our concerns with regard to access to AEDs in youth sports.

As friends of Larry and Evelyn Pontbriant and parents of four, I feel the need to review the reason why I am testifying today. A straight A student, 3 sport athlete, with a varsity letter in lacrosse his freshman year, young Larry could be with us today if an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) had been available. He was my oldest son's best friend, a friend of the entire family and a role model for all four of my children. As a result of our friendship with Larry and his parents, I now have 3 children playing lacrosse and am currently the vice-president of the Norwich Youth Lacrosse Association, which Mr. Pontbriant was a founding board member. I cannot even begin to imagine the pain Larry's parent's feel and I hope I never have to. AEDs are proven technology that have saved many lives and need to be more prevalent throughout all communities in our state and country. This bill is one step in the right direction to getting more access to these life saving devices.

As a testament to the reliability of this technology, in 2002 the state of New York passed "Louis' Law" after a young athlete, Louis Acompora, passed away from sudden cardiac arrest while playing lacrosse and the result of this state law was to place AEDs in New York schools. As a direct result of the passage of this law, 40 lives have already been saved by AEDs throughout New York as of February 28th of this year.

Changes to the current statute requiring the availability of one or more AEDs at health clubs and institutions of higher education to be made available during athletic activities and events is a wise decision and a step in the right direction. However, there are many athletic activities and events that do not occur at institutions of higher education or even at public schools. Many organizations, leagues and towns have their own athletic facilities for multiple events that occur almost daily. Most of these facilities do not fall under the Mass Gathering statute and would not require the presence of EMS equipment or personnel. If the definition of institutions of higher education means elementary schools even then it still does not cover the entire spectrum of athletic events in our communities.

Our concern with SB 687 rests with the definition of "Institution of Higher Education". As previously stated, many of the facilities where youth sports are played are usually not at "institutions of higher learning". A goal of organizations such as the American Heart Association and our Norwich Youth Lacrosse Association and other youth sports organizations is public access to AEDs but public access can not happen until those who own and operate the device are covered under the Connecticut Samaritan statute. The Pontbriants, my family and others along with the Connecticut office of the American Heart Association has advocated for Good Samaritan protections for those who own and operate an AED. We have been unsuccessful to date though inroads have been made by passing legislation creating two separate AED Task Forces and requiring AEDs on public golf courses. It is of our opinion that removing liability barriers for public access to defibrillation for both the user and entity is a crucial component to expanding and mandating placement of AEDs. Currently state statute only covers the user. We would ask the committee to consider first amending the current Good Samaritan statute to include Good Samaritan Immunity protection for the entity housing the device.

Senate Bill 687 encompasses many goals of us concerned citizens but still leaves a fundamental issue unresolved. First and foremost, Connecticut businesses, and organizations and individuals who are involved in the placement and usage of an AED must be provided with Good Samaritan immunity protection in order to properly expand public access to AEDS. We urge you to amend this legislation and provide the necessary protection.

I thank the Committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 687. Thank you.