



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE
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Testimony of Michelle Cruz, State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Education Committee
Monday, February 23, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee. For the record my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

Raised House Bill No. 6489, An Act Concerning School Arrest Reporting
Raised House Bill No. 6494, An Act Concerning Teen Dating Violence Education

One of the many responsibilities of the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) is to conduct programs of public education and outreach to the community. In December of 2007, the OVA sent letters to all colleges, universities and high schools around the state to offer the OVA as a resource to their institution. The response was overwhelming; the OVA visited numerous classes, varying from criminal justice to health awareness. The OVA discussed issues relating to victims' rights, teen violence, sexual assault and safety.

Unfortunately, the days of missing lunch money and other minor offenses among students are over. Across the country, we are seeing and hearing accounts of horrific incidents of violence in our schools. Raised House Bill No. 6489 will require the Department of Education to collect and track data regarding school based arrests. This information can be vital to the educational communities as they shape policy for student behavior and consequences. I strongly urge the committee to support this important proposal.

Statistics show that one in three teenagers has experienced violence in a dating relationship. Teen dating violence is often hidden because teenagers typically are inexperienced with dating relationships, want independence from their parents, are pressured by peers and have "romantic" views of love. Just as we educate our children about health and exercise, we must teach about healthy relationships and personal safety. Raised House Bill No. 6494 will provide teenagers with knowledge of teen dating violence and guidance for choosing healthy relationships.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle S. Cruz
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State Victim Advocate