

**Testimony Before Public Health Committee**  
**Connecticut General Assembly**  
**February 27, 2009**  
**SB 981**

Distinguished Chairman Harris, Madam Chair Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of SB 981 An Act Concerning Automatic External Defibrillators in Schools. My name is Hunter Kodama, a resident of North Stonington and a student at the Norwich Free Academy.

Two summers ago, the Norwich Free Academy community and the surrounding area was shocked with news of the death of Larry Pontbriant – a son, a student, a teammate, and a friend. When he collapsed during a recreational run through Mohegan Park, his heart fell into a state of ventricular fibrillation, and oxygen was no longer being pumped to his brain. When paramedics arrived at the scene of his collapse, they used an Automated External Defibrillator to return his heartbeat to a normal rhythm, but too much time had passed without circulation. Had an AED been available more quickly, he might have survived.

Upon returning to school for the 2007-2008 year, there was a different feeling in the air. Larry was on everyone's mind – the feelings most associated with the situation were disbelief and sadness. However, many students also felt a need to come together, to do something about it. It's hard to find a positive outcome as a result of Larry's death, but the unity brought by it can definitely be classified as such. In the early days of that school year, the students here with me launched a campaign to help create, support and pass the type of legislation we are discussing today. We gathered thousands of signatures to petition our representatives to support AED legislation, fundraised for the Larry Pontbriant Athletic Safety Fund in order to purchase AEDs and worked to raise awareness about the cause.

According to the American Heart Association, the use of AEDs in cases such as Larry's could help save up to 20,000 lives per year. In the news regularly, there are more and more similar cases of cardiac arrests where an AED could have saved a life. With 250,000 deaths from cardiac arrest each year, it is imperative that public places be equipped with these life saving machines, and the passage of this bill, SB 981, through the Connecticut General Assembly will be a significant step toward achieving this goal. You must recognize that the effects of an untimely death reach out to many more people than the deceased, or even his or her immediate family.

The students from the Norwich Free Academy who are present today represent a fraction of our larger group back at school, and only a minute portion of the teenagers, community members and residents of Connecticut, who have been affected by Larry's death and others like it. It is unfortunate that it took Larry's tragic death to be the catalyst for our school to install AEDs on campus, but it is our goal now, that with the passage of this bill, schools will be prepared, and such tragedies can be prevented elsewhere.

Respectfully, I thank the members of the Public Health Committee for allowing me to testify today, for your time, and consideration of SB 981.