



2074 Park Street, Suite L
Hartford, CT 06106
860-523-9146

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Andrew Schneider, I am Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, and I am here to support Raised Bill 5318 which would direct state agencies to develop minimum standardized training requirements for school resource officers (SROs), the sworn law enforcement personnel who are stationed permanently in the public schools. Proper training can greatly improve the performance of SRO programs and yield benefits like significantly reducing the number of school-based arrests.

There is no question that guaranteeing the safety of our public schools is of the utmost importance. Nor is there any doubt that SROs can help make schools safer by mediating disputes and by deterring or halting misconduct.

However, the ACLU, along with a number of other civil rights and civil liberties groups, have become increasingly concerned over the last few years with the national trend of criminalizing rather than educating our nation's children through an increased reliance on zero-tolerance school discipline and school-based arrests. With rare exceptions, school safety should be the province of school administrators, not police officers. The constant presence of police officers in school may weaken this principle, making it more likely that minor disciplinary infractions will be met with a criminal justice response. We must never come to view arresting students at school as just another approach to discipline. Instead, we must ask: Was this arrest a rational, proportional, and evenhanded response to misbehavior?

Our recent report on the use of SROs in Hartford area schools revealed that school-based arrests were on the rise and were disproportionately impacting children of color. In addition, the study found that students in Hartford, East Hartford, and West Hartford were being arrested at very young ages. During the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, 86 primary grade students were arrested at school in Hartford. A majority of those arrested were seventh or eighth graders, but 25 were in grades four through six and 13 were in grades three or below.

In the three districts surveyed, we found the SRO training requirements to be uneven. SROs must have training in the wide variety of competencies their positions require: counseling, mentoring, basic classroom teaching, child and adolescent psychology,

cultural competence, applicable legal principles, problem-solving, and mediation, just to name a few. Proper training yields substantial benefits – in 2006, for instance, Bridgeport’s school security director credited the city’s SRO training efforts with helping to cut its school-based arrest rate in half. Conversely, as one federally-funded report concluded, “without proper training, SROs can make serious mistakes related to their relationships with students, school administrators, and parents that at best cause short-term crises and at worst jeopardize the entire program in the school.”¹

By improving the performance of SRO programs with proper SRO training, we can halt the rise of school-based arrests and help ensure that Connecticut’s public schools are safe, happy, and healthy places of learning for all the state’s children. Therefore, I urge you to pass Raised Bill 5318.

¹ Peter Finn, et al., *Comparison of Program Activities and Lessons Learned Among 19 School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs*, Feb. 28, 2005, at 50, available at http://www.ncdjjdp.org/cpsv/pdf_files/SRO_Natl_Survey.pdf.