

## Testimony H.B. No. 5504

March 18, 2010

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Mr. John W. Fonfara, Co-Chair  
Ms. Vickie Orsini Nardello, Co-Chair  
Energy and Technology Subcommittee  
Room 3900  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Co-Chairs and Esteemed Committee Members:

It is a privilege to have this opportunity to speak with you on a subject as important as HB No. 5504 (Raised) – An Act Concerning Siting of Cell Towers Near Schools. HB No. 5504 is an important step forward in adjusting the Connecticut State Siting Council's ubiquitous authority in the siting of cell towers and make a necessary statement that enough scientific data is known that, while not violating the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996, the precautionary principle should hold true to protect the most innocent, vulnerable and dependent among us – our school children.

Since May 2009, my neighbors in the North Mianus (public) School District of Riverside (Greenwich), Connecticut have been battling to prevent T-Mobile USA's construction of a monopole (flagpole) telecommunications structure on a private residence 230 feet from the North Mianus Elementary School consisting of 474 Kindergarten through fifth grade students plus staff (160 feet from the Kindergarten playground) and 600 feet from a newly opened Bridges Pre-School (75 two to five year-old students plus staff). This group of community volunteers has rode a roller coaster of victories and defeats over the past year in a yet to be decided issue.

It is incredulous to most if not all of us that this tower can be located so close to a school despite the spirited disapproval of the community, Greenwich Planning & Zoning Commission, Connecticut State Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General and Greenwich First Selectman. When I speak to people throughout the State – your constituents – there are the typical stages of grief: a very long and disbelieving denial process that this could be allowed to happen in the United States of America; anger toward T-Mobile, the Connecticut State Siting Council and the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (i.e. the state and federal government); bargaining about the site or terms of such a facility (or with their conscience regarding the safety risks); depression of the thought of fighting so many levels of government and then, in most cases, an acceptance that a cell tower will be going up next to our cherished elementary school.

**HB No. 5504**  
**GREGORY W. SCHULTE**  
**TESTIMONY**

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But this paradigm was not accepted as fact by the North Mianus School community. The more they were told it couldn't be done, the more this group was determined to fight the placement of the cell towers near schools. Progress has been made toward finding an alternate site and their voices have been heard throughout Greenwich. In December, as a newly elected member of the Greenwich Representative Town Meeting ("RTM") representing the North Mianus School community, I was present as these community volunteers requested our assistance in promoting their cause further.

My immediate concern was the financial implications (i.e. reduced property values) of a school being perceived as a "toxic school," despite what the science might say. I became a member of the community group and, by peer reviewing, questioning and challenging the overwhelming amount of research this group had done, I became convinced, as they were, that the health dangers are real. I then became driven, as I believe the sponsors of this bill are, to dignify the work that had been done by these volunteers. In January 2010 our RTM district approved and, on March 8, 2010, the full Greenwich RTM overwhelming approved the following sense of the meeting resolution:

*WHEREAS, T-Mobile USA is proposing to build a wireless telecommunications facility, comprised of an estimated 100-foot structure, at 328 Palmer Hill Road, this location being 230 feet from North Mianus Elementary School, a school with 454 Kindergarten to Fifth Grade students plus staff, 160 feet from the North Mianus School Kindergarten playground, and 600 feet from the Bridges School which opened in 2010 with 74 students from two to five years old plus staff; and*

*WHEREAS, the Greenwich Board of Education has consistently stated that it opposes similar wireless telecommunications structures on its properties, adjacent properties or in close proximity to such properties;*

***NOW THEREFORE, it is the sense of the Greenwich Representative Town Meeting that wireless telecommunications structures as regulated by the Connecticut Siting Council not be constructed within 1,500 feet of any accredited school located in the Town of Greenwich.***

HB No. 5504 elevates the Greenwich RTM sense of the meeting resolution to a much more important and binding level. I urge you to pass HB No. 5504 for all the families in Connecticut who put their faith in their elected officials that their children are safe in our schools.

Sincerely,



Gregory W. Schulte  
District 12 Representative  
Greenwich Representative Town Meeting