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March 1, 2010

Education Committee

Testimony in support of HB-5315

**An Act Concerning Education and the Reduction of Domestic
Violence**

Good afternoon. Thank you Representative Fleischman, Senator Gaffey and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 5315, An Act Concerning the Education and the Reduction of Domestic Violence.

The bill before you comes from the recommendations of the Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence, which I have had the opportunity to chair. Speaker Donovan created the task force last fall to take a comprehensive look at all issues surrounding domestic violence and put forward legislative proposals. Beginning in November, the task force met with a wide variety of stake holders around domestic violence. After several meetings, the task force unanimously voted on a wide variety of recommendations. Those recommendations focused on both improving services for victims of domestic violence, strengthening penalties for offenders and improving methods of prevention.

As a community, we must change the way we look at the issue of domestic violence. The question can no longer be "Why does she stay with him, why does she put up with him?" Instead it should be "Why does he think he can treat her that way?" In order to do that, we must begin to educate all members of our community about this issue. The bill before you today is a small, but important first step towards preventing the cycle of domestic

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violence from continuing. We must especially focus on educating our young people, our teachers, and our educational staff about this issue.

During task force meetings we heard consistently about the importance of educating young people about teen dating violence and domestic violence. I hope that in the future Connecticut can follow the lead of our neighbor Rhode Island, and implement far reaching reforms that require the teaching of these subjects to all of our students. However, the task force has chosen, given the large fiscal difficulties facing our state and our municipalities, to focus on low cost or no cost solutions this year.

This legislation adds teen dating violence and domestic violence to the list of topics covered by in-service training programs for teachers and administrators. It also allows schools districts to include other staff members who work with students on a daily basis such as paraprofessionals and non-certified employees to take part in this training. The State Department of Education has developed a Healthy and Balanced curriculum framework which is accessible to all school districts.

According to the results of the 2007 Connecticut School Health Survey, 13.4% of Connecticut students reported being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a significant other during the preceding 12 months. This is dramatically and unacceptably higher than the national average of 9.9%. Educating our teachers and educational staff on the warning signs of teen dating violence is a critical component of breaking this trend.

In addition to the support of the State Department of Education, school districts across our state are already working with Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence member programs to educate students and teachers about teen dating and domestic violence. This legislation would encourage more school districts to engage in such partnerships.

Again, thank you Representative Fleischman, Senator Gaffey and members of the committee for raising this bill and allowing it to be heard. I also want to genuinely thank Speaker Donovan for his leadership in forming the Domestic Violence Task Force and his tremendous advocacy on behalf of this legislation.