



**Connecticut Education
Association**

Governance

Philip Apruzzese, President
Sheila Cohen, Vice President
Cheryl Prevost, Secretary
Jeff Leake, Treasurer
Maureen Honan, NEA Director
Tom Nicholas, NEA Director

Executive Office

Dr. John Yrchik
Executive Director

Policy & Professional Practice

Mary Loftus Levine, Director
Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street
Hartford, CT 06106-8001
860-525-5641, 800-842-4316
Fax: 860-725-6328
www.cea.org

Affiliated with the
National Education
Association

**TESTIMONY OF ROBYN KAPLAN-CHO,
CONNECTICUT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
REGARDING SENATE BILL NO. 1139
AAC STRATEGIC PLANNING IN STATE
EDUCATION POLICY AND
ASSAULTS ON TEACHERS
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

MARCH 11, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Robyn Kaplan-Cho and I am employed by the Connecticut Education Association where my responsibilities include advising and educating teachers about their rights and responsibilities.

CEA strongly supports SB 1139 because it provides a much needed means of enforcement of an existing law – Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-233g(a) - that requires a school principal who receives a written report from an assaulted school employee to file that report with the local police authority. The intent of this law (passed in 1979) was to create a systematic method of reporting incidents of violence occurring in the public schools. The transcript of the debate over the passage of this law reveals that even over 30 years ago, violence against school staff members was a prevalent problem that needed to be better documented. The transcript states:

“Rep. Cibes: (39th)

One of the problems with violence in the schools is that we simply do not know the extent of the problem. Except for occasional stories in the newspaper, there is no systematic methods of reporting the incidents of violence in the schools ... It is hoped that this bill would end [a] what some people presume to be a cover-up of incidents of violence in the schools. Certainly, school boards often have an incentive being concerned with their public image, to hush up the incidents. Principals may well be as

concerned with their jobs, discourage reporting of incidents of violence. This bill would provide for such a system..."

"Rep. Ahearn: (55th)

And you would probably ask the question, why should you force the principal to make a report? Isn't he doing it now? And my answer is, in many cases he is not doing it now. And we are talking about an extremely serious situation ... And I want to tell you that it doesn't just occur in Hartford or New Haven or New Britain, but it occurs in Fairfield County and it occurs in Avon, Connecticut and it occurs in Stafford Springs. We have a national disease called permissiveness, a lack of respect for authority ... All we're asking is the principal, who's supposed to be responsible for the school, report a crime within his school to the police... The intent of that is to not allow a crime to go unreported to the police ... I don't think they can hide or cover up as well if they have to, by law, report it to the police. That's the intent. It's the foremost persuasion..."

The reality is that CEA members and their fellow school employees still are being assaulted at work on a regular basis. Data collected by the State Department of Education reveals that over the past four (4) years, there have been over 6,400 reported incidents of physical violence against school employees. And these are just the reported incidents. We know first-hand that many teachers do not ever report an assault to the administration. Sometimes, it is because they are ill-informed of their right to do. In those cases, it is CEA's job to change that through educating our members about their rights. But unfortunately, many of our members still are genuinely fearful of formally reporting an incident when they are physically assaulted. They may fear retribution from the administration or perhaps from the student's family.

However, in cases where teachers do take the bold step of filing a report with the principal pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233g(a), we are encountering some problems with principals who are not following this requirement, in flagrant violation of the intent of this law described above. You will hear from our local teacher leaders in Bridgeport and Greenwich about a persistent problem with principals discouraging teachers from reporting an assault and not following through with the local police when the report is filed. Yet, it remains in the entire school community's best interest for the administration and local police, consistent with the original intent of this law, to be made aware of all incidents of a physical assault against staff members. It allows the school to track repeated violent student behaviors and develop better behavior plans to allow the student to function without aggression in the school building. It also allows the local police to be made aware of instances of violence in the schools.

But, as the law is currently written, we are left without any remedy when a principal has not fulfilled his/her statutory reporting requirement – there is simply nothing we can do.

We support this bill because it will put some teeth into this law by imposing a fine and educational training for those principals who do not abide by the law. This proposed penalty simply mirrors the current penalty for any mandated reporter who fails to report pursuant to his/her statutory obligation.

We also request that the bill be amended to permit any school employee to file the assault report with the principal on behalf of an assaulted employee and require a principal who witnesses an assault on a school employee to file a report with the local police. This would address the problem of an assaulted employee being too fearful to file a report him/herself and will allow school districts and local police to have more accurate information on the number of violent incidents in the district. Draft language for this is attached.

Any act of violence in schools must be acknowledged and taken seriously. This bill simply ensures a better flow of information from the school staff to the administration and ultimately to the local police, consistent with the intent of this law. We urge your support of SB 1139.

Thank you.

Proposed Amended Language for SB 1139

Sec. 10-233g. Reports of principals to police authority concerning physical assaults upon school employees by students. (a) Where there is a physical assault made by a student upon a teacher or other school employee on school property or in performance of school duties and such teacher or employee or any other teacher or employee files a written report with the school principal based upon such assault, or the school building principal witnesses such assault, the school building principal shall report such physical assault to the local police authority. A school building principal who fails to report such assault to the local police authority under the provisions of this section shall be fined not less than five hundred dollars nor more than two thousand five hundred dollars and shall be required to participate in an educational and training program established by the Commissioner of Education.