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Public Testimony regarding SB 952 – An Act Concerning the Enhanced Penalty for the Sale or Possession of Drugs Near Schools, Day Care Centers and Public Housing Projects.

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sam Tracy and I am a lifetime resident of South Windsor, CT. I am currently a student at the University of Connecticut, where I am studying political science, and am a member of the school's student government. As president of UConn's chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, I pay close attention to drug-related arrests on campus and policies that affect students. Of the dozens of students I have seen arrested, a surprising number have been charged not only with marijuana possession, but with possession in a school zone. These students were not selling drugs to schoolchildren, nor were they on school grounds – they were using marijuana in their dorm rooms. While this is obviously against the law, it is unjust that these students are facing additional penalties for being in a school zone while they had no interaction nor intent to interact with schoolchildren.

The reason these students have been charged with possession in a school zone is because some of UConn's dormitories fall within the 1500-foot range of E.O. Smith High School. Buckley residence hall, the dormitory that houses UConn's freshman Honors community, falls within this range. Thus, a student living in Buckley who is caught with marijuana in his or her dorm room faces a much harsher punishment than a student who does the same exact thing in a dormitory that is farther than 1500 feet from the high school. These students, who are academically successful and have great prospects for improving our state in the future, often have their personal lives and academic careers tarnished with the additional charge of possession in a school zone.

This makes very little sense, and is obviously not the intent of the law. I understand, and agree with, the law's intent to prevent drug dealers from selling to children. However, the arbitrary 1500-foot radius casts a much wider net, which ensnares many people who were not engaging in the sale of drugs to children.

I also strongly agree with the provision of this bill that would limit the enforcement of the law to times that are during school hours or during school-sponsored events. Once again, there are many parts of UConn that fall within a school zone. If a student is arrested for marijuana possession at midnight outside, and he or she is within 1500 feet of E.O. Smith, it does not make sense to penalize him or her for being in a school zone. If there are no children in the school, it is clear that charging people with possession in a school zone is doing nothing to protect the children.

Please pass SB 952, as the current laws are ensnaring unintended populations who do not deserve the enhanced penalty.

Sincerely,  
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