



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. 1163
AAC ASSAULT OF A SCHOOL EMPLOYEE
BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 30, 2011**

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary 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.

I think we can all agree that a safe school environment and respect for all school staff is an absolute prerequisite to learning. We also can all agree that school staff and students should be entitled to come to school every day feeling safe. But the disturbing reality is that teachers and their fellow school employees are being assaulted at work on a regular basis. Eye-opening data collected by the State Department of Education reveals that during the past four (4) years, there have been over 6,400 reported incidents of physical violence against school employees. That amounts to more than 40 assaults per week. And these are the reported cases only; the actual number of assaults is much higher. We know for certain that many teachers are too fearful of retribution to ever file a report of an assault with their administrator, much less with the local police.

Today you will have the benefit of hearing the stories directly from teachers who have first-hand experience with being assaulted by their students. You will appreciate the devastating impact that this has had on them, particularly where the student was a repeat offender who had not been appropriately disciplined in prior cases of violence against staff and thus was able to commit yet another assault on a teacher.

CEA strongly supports SB 1163 because it will increase the penalty for any person who assaults a school employee. In this unfortunate era of

workplace violence stories being reported on a regular basis, passage of this bill will send a message that school staff must be respected and their physical safety ensured.

Moreover, passage of this bill will place Connecticut with the majority of states that see fit to protect their school employees from workplace violence. Our research has revealed that 39 states currently have laws that provide an enhanced penalty for an assault on a school employee.

Finally, the concept of affording special protection to certain persons based on their profession is nothing new under Connecticut law, as evidenced by the other classes of individuals cited under C.G.S. Section 53a-167c such as:

"a reasonably identifiable peace officer, special policeman appointed under section 29-18b, Department of Motor Vehicles inspector appointed under section 14-8 and certified pursuant to section 7-294d, firefighter or employee of an emergency medical service organization, as defined in section 53a-3, emergency room physician or nurse, employee of the Department of Correction, member or employee of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, probation officer, employee of the Judicial Branch assigned to provide pretrial secure detention and programming services to juveniles accused of the commission of a delinquent act, employee of the Department of Children and Families assigned to provide direct services to children and youths in the care or custody of the department, employee of a municipal police department assigned to provide security at the police department's lockup and holding facility or active individual member of a volunteer canine search and rescue team, as defined in section 5-249, from performing his or her duties, and while such peace officer, special policeman, motor vehicle inspector, firefighter, employee, physician, nurse, member, probation officer or active individual member is acting in the performance of his or her duties."

Thus, Connecticut has a longstanding policy of recognizing that certain groups of individuals may be more prone to being assaulted at work and thus merit special protection under the law.

Please support Senate Bill 1163 and allow the judicial system to respond to the seriousness of an assault on a school employee by providing the police and courts with options that would be appropriate given the seriousness of the conduct.

Thank you for your consideration.