

UCPEA

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

AFT Connecticut, AFT, AFL-CIO Local 3695

To: Senator Edith Prague, Senator Edwin Gomes, Senator Tony Guglielmo,
Representative Bruce Zelaski, Representative Louis Esposito, Representative
Ezequiel Santiago, Representative John Rigby and members of the Labor and
Public Employees Committee

From: Peggy Beckett-Rinker, Executive Director of UCPEA

Re: Committee Bill No. 5174, An Act concerning State Employees and Training to
Deal with Workplace Violence

The University of Connecticut Professional Employees Association representing more than 1,700 non teaching professional employees at the University of Connecticut Storrs Campus , the School of Law, the School of Social Work and the regional campuses fully supports mandatory training to instruct state employees on workplace violence awareness, prevention and preparedness.

In addition we support a program to reduce workplace stress including awareness and prevention which is called for in section (a) of the newly drafted bill. However we believe that this training should also be mandatory.

We live in extremely stressful times. In many of our work sites we have employees who have had to do more with less. Often they are asked to pick up the work of colleagues who have taken advantage of the last two early retirement offers and have not been replaced. The stresses of having to deal with a pay cut while expenses continue to rise.

In December of 2008 UCPEA's Women's Issues Committee ran a survey asking that employees identify major sources of stress for them. The state economy and the state budget, the national economy and job security as a state employee were the top three choices with 59.4%, 57.4% and 52.4% respectively. More than 20% identified "feeling overworked in my professional role for an extended period of time" a major source of stress. Since this poll was run both the state and national economy have gotten worse, the

state budget promises to be problematic and job security is still a concern. If we were to run that survey today I am sure that the results would not be any better.

We have also had a number of complaints about workplace bullying and will be taking a poll of our membership on bullying in the workplace. We have invited Professor Katherine Hermes to address our members. And we have engaged the University's Administration in a discussion on the topic hoping to have an ombudsman in place who will report directly to the president. But we know we have a long way to go in order to ensure a workplace free of harassment and bullying and we hope the Legislature will act precipitously to enact anti workplace bullying legislation.

We were happy to see violence prevention and training in section (b) of the bill and agree that the training should be mandatory. Every workplace has the potential to become the site of violence. We have seen violence on and off campus. I have stood by UConn Police Chief Hudd as students return to the Storrs campus in the fall when he noted that the sleepy little town of Mansfield becomes a small city with all of a city's problems including drinking and driving, drugs, assaults, robbery, rape etc. The campus is the workplace of UCPEA employees, many of whom work during Spring Weekend. This event has often been the scene of out of control behavior most of it perpetrated by visitors to the campus and the surrounding apartments. This year, in order to curb this behavior the administration has decided not to sponsor any University events. While it is doubtful that such behavior will cease to exist, it is hoped that the actions of students and off campus visitors will be curbed.

The UConn Police Department Currently offers a Workplace Violence Prevention Training which is quite good. It is specific to the University environment and includes a video produced by the Center for Personal Protection and Safety outlining things that can be done in an escalating situation. It covers employee and student violence, stranger violence, client violence and domestic violence. It instructs employees and students on the use of the emergency blue phones that are located around campus, the use of 911 and use of the emergency notification system used by the police to alert students and staff

when an incident occurs. It is tailored to the specific environment within the University where staff, students, professors and clients interact. However, this training is voluntary and I am certain most employees at the University have not had it.

I understand there are some who will question putting resources into this training when we are in a difficult budget situation. I would ask: If it saves one life, how can we afford not to?

