



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Public Hearing

Testimony

By

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Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on **Raised Bill 6655, *An Act Concerning Campus Safety and Security***.

The University of Connecticut appreciates the Legislatures on-going interest and commitment to the safety of our colleges and universities. As you may know, I am Barbara O'Connor, the Chief of Police and Director of Public Safety at the University of Connecticut. I have over 30 years law enforcement experiences, and have served as the chief of police at three different state flagship universities.

Towards that end, and like most major universities the University of Connecticut (UConn) has long had mechanisms in place to recognize and respond to members of the University community who may be at risk of harm to themselves or others. For the past several months, UConn's *Behavioral Threat Assessment Team Committee* (BTATC) has been working to enhance UConn's threat assessment procedures and to ensure that the processes in place meet or exceed best practices nationwide.

UConn therefore supports legislation requiring trained threat assessment teams at each of the state's institutions of higher education as such legislation coincides with UConn's efforts to update its own threat assessment procedures, provide additional training and implement a unified process for assessing and responding to potential threats to the university community. UConn has trained its team in the past and is currently in the process of scheduling a nationally recognized expert to come to campus to provide additional training to its team.

UConn strongly recommends, however, that the responsibility for identifying the composition of the threat assessment team be given to the administration of each institution,

as they are in the best position to evaluate which members of their particular institution are most appropriately suited for inclusion on their institution's threat assessment team. Moreover, given the complexity and confidentiality of issues involved in behavioral threat assessment, UConn opposes the inclusion of students on any threat assessment team.

Please let me elaborate. Threat assessment teams necessarily review and discuss some of any institution's most sensitive information, including medical records of faculty, staff and students, and records of performance and evaluation. It would be extremely difficult if not impossible to engage in such discussions without including individually identifiable information that simply should not be shared with students. These essential conversations will be significantly curtailed if they must occur with a student present. Further, labor agreements and state law place significant restrictions on who may access sensitive personnel information without an employee's consent, and state and federal law restrict the sharing of information from student's medical and/or educational records. In addition, internal institutional investigations, and even criminal investigations, could be severely compromised if there are leaks of information.

Since the mass murders at Virginia Tech, colleges and universities across the country have implemented some form of behavioral intervention teams. There are recognized best practices on the composition of such teams, and I am not aware any that recommend participation of students.

Student input into the safety of the campus is critical, and colleges and universities should have avenues for students to share their concerns. How campuses do this across the state varies, but each campus is required to identify their safety programs within their annual security report.

Campus safety is a complex task and the work you are engaging in will lead to positive reforms. As it relates to behavioral threat assessment teams, I would urge you to explore Connecticut law to determine if there are existing legal barriers preventing full disclosure of information within the context of the threat assessment teams. As you know, one of the issues in the Virginia Tech incident was the misunderstanding and application of the law. Many within Virginia Tech interpreted the laws as preventing them from sharing information. It is imperative that individuals engaged in the threat assessment process be fully aware of their ability to share information as necessary, as well as any legal limitations on that ability.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.