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**Testimony on H.B. 6682: AAC Collaboration Between Boards of Education
and Law Enforcement Personnel**

Judiciary Committee

The National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut chapter, representing over 3200 members supports H.B. 6682 as an effective tool to assuring adequate collaboration between local school boards and police departments for the best interest of students.

All too often a lack of communication and understanding of the needs of school children lead to unnecessary arrests of children in schools, especially where police are stationed in the school. Arresting a student leads to a criminal record and significant disruption of the student's educational opportunities. In cases where the arrest was for a non-dangerous or non-violent action there is real harm to the student that could have been avoided by using less intensive means, such as internal school disciplinary action or referral to the school's social worker, psychologist or counselor. In school systems where there is no formal MOU between the police and school board these overreactions by the school based police occur at a much higher rate than in those systems that have a MOU in place. This demonstrates that a formal agreement between the school system and local police works and thus should be required for all localities where police are stationed in schools.

It is also of great concern to us that data has shown that children of color are more likely to be arrested than Caucasian children. This inequity needs to be addressed and again, having a formal agreement between the school board and police that spells out what actions are to be taken in various situations will help to eliminate the disparity as to which students are arrested.

Often when a student is acting out or being disruptive in a school setting there is an underlying cause that needs to be determined. Dysfunction in the family, child abuse, marital problems between the parents, drug or alcohol use or an undiagnosed mental illness are amongst the reasons we see for misbehavior by school aged children. In such cases the appropriate response calls for evaluation and if needed, treatment by a professional trained in the specialization called for. Thus it is critical that school based police work closely with the school's mental health personnel and utilize referral to a school official as the first response to non-violent and non-dangerous actions by students. This is most likely to occur when a MOU is in place. For example, the Bridgeport public schools have a MOU between the police and school board that has lead to a very positive working relationship between the school social workers and school based police. The school social workers have found that this collaboration has allowed them to effectively intervene and address student problems in a way that avoids unnecessary arrests.

H.B. 6682 will reduce school based arrests, meet student's needs in at an appropriate level of response and will provide for better data on school based arrests so that systems can design programs to best meet student needs. We urge the committee to favorably report out this bill in a bipartisan vote.