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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5355:
AN ACT CONCERNING COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and other members of the Committee on Education, my name is Joe Gaudett and I serve as the Chief of Police in Bridgeport, and I am submitting this testimony to let you know that our Department is fully supportive of proposed **H.B. 5355: An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and School Resource Officers.**

Police and educators in Bridgeport have a common goal of supporting our students and that support is all the more important for children in crisis. To further this end, two years ago, the Bridgeport Police Department and the Board of Education (BOE) entered into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) where we laid out very clearly our goals and criteria for police and the school system to work together to make our schools safe and also reduce the number of school-based arrests.

As a result, we have enjoyed a great deal of success since our Police Department assumed responsibility for school security in City schools. The result has been improved collaboration, outstanding cooperation and a reduction in school based arrests. We have succeeded in reducing the arrests that take place in our schools by nearly 35 percent. I believe that effort has made the Bridgeport school system one of the safest in the state and also established it as model for collaboration.

There have been bumps that we have worked through, and I think that underscores the importance of this legislation. The key to success is for partners in law enforcement and the BOE to have an understanding and clearly defined parameters of the role of law enforcement in schools. H.B. 5355 would require districts to have written formal agreements regarding the roles and responsibilities of police in schools. OPM's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee developed a model memorandum of agreement for school districts that codifies the role of police officers and school administrators when school resource officers are in their schools.

As a part of efforts in Bridgeport, we have identified one officer, Lt. Paul Grech, to be assigned full time as the liaison and supervisor for security at City schools. The efforts of Lt. Grech and the assistance provided to him by Capt. Roderick Porter can't be overstated.

School based arrests, however, are a continuing concern in our city. Arrest should be the final option and never an act of convenience to remove a disruptive student from a classroom. Children should not be arrested and taken out of school for minor infractions that may technically constitute disorderly conduct, breach of peace, or even assault third degree, when administrative sanctions that would keep the child in school and ensure that they continue to learn would be more appropriate and are readily available through school based staff.

I believe, as do my partners in the school system, that children belong in classrooms and not jail cells. To achieve that goal statewide, we need the collaboration of educators, law enforcement professionals and legislators.

Some provisions in this proposal would appear to be common sense and I don't disagree. The reality is the incidents that lead to school-based arrests are fluid and volatile which is what makes it so important to set a statewide standard where officers and educators have clear policies defined through thoughtful MOAs. And we must provide our professionals with the tools and guidance they deserve.

We need this legislation to provide information and incentive to level the education playing field in every community and to give all students in Connecticut the chance to be in their classrooms and take advantage of the educational reforms that are currently underway.

I urge you to pass this bill into law so that these important goals can be furthered in Bridgeport and achieved in all of Connecticut's communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.