

Testimony of Matthew Nittoly
Executive Director, Side by Side Charter School
Submitted to Appropriations Committee
March 11, 2014

Honorable Chairpersons and respected members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Matthew Nittoly, and I am Executive Director of Side-by-Side Charter School in Norwalk. We are an independent state charter school serving students in grades Pre-K through eight.

I am here to thank Governor Malloy for including public charter schools in his latest school safety grant proposal, and to urge the General Assembly to follow suit.

School safety has been on the front of our collective minds this past year. Just fresh off the heart-wrenching, one-year anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, we must never forget the importance of protecting our students while they learn.

As the head of Side by Side Charter School, I know the feeling of your heart sinking after realizing that an intruder has entered your school putting your students and staff at risk. Unfortunately, this occurred at Side by Side Charter School earlier this year. While the brave men and women of the Norwalk Police Department quickly apprehended the assailant, the sad truth is that this experience is too common for it to be considered unique. Although we were fortunate to avert a tragedy, the sad truth is that all public schools have safety needs--including public charter schools, which have even fewer resources to meet this need.

Governor Malloy and the General Assembly should be commended for moving mountains in order to better protect Connecticut students after this tragedy. You created the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission to examine ways to make students safer, and signed into law the Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety Act. Among other things, this law provided state funding for security upgrades at certain public schools. I say "certain" because some schools, such as public charters and technical schools were told that they were not eligible.

We're glad this would be fixed in the Governor's proposal because the need for safe classrooms transcends the type of public school a child attends. Our students are just as deserving of feeling safe in the classroom as their friends down the street and across the state. I assure you that the vast majority of students who attend public charter schools come from neighborhoods where crime is a very real issue, and their safety while in the classroom is a primary concern of ours. That's why it is crucial that charters are included in this next round of funding and allowed to compete for the same grants as other public schools.

Again, we are grateful for the governor's proposal and implore you not to forget about the safety of public charter school students. In doing so, you can send a clear message that everyone's safety matters, regardless of what type of public school they attend.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to working with you all on this important issue.