



State of Connecticut

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Good morning Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

I am here today to testify in favor of Raised Senate Bill 54, AAC COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL.

All children attending public schools in Connecticut should feel that they are in a safe learning environment. In the wake of the tragedies at Sandy Hook Elementary School and other schools across our nation, many districts have sought to strengthen students' sense of safety by hiring School Resource Officers (SRO's), typically police officers assigned to work within a school.

This well-intended step often brings unintended consequences. Studies show that, when SRO's are hired in the absence of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU's) between police departments and the school districts – and without specialized training – arrest rates of students shoot up.

This happens because, without MOU's, school resource officers often lack the information they need to know which offenses can be handled administratively within the school, without any arrest. A study of nineteen schools titled "Education Under Arrest" by the Justice Policy Institute in November of 2011 showed that SRO programs encounter serious challenges when guidelines for conduct are not explicit. In addition, SRO's are likely to take on multiple roles within a school when their jobs are not defined – some of which detract from a central focus on student safety.

As I mentioned, schools and school districts without MOU's typically see a sharp rise in the arrest of students when the number of school resource officers increases. It is important that we ensure that school districts and law enforcement agencies work together under MOU's, so that we can avoid unintentional criminalization of student misbehavior.

Such criminalization creates unnecessary, costly burdens for our judicial system. Wrongly criminalized students are often placed in juvenile detention centers, which cost Connecticut taxpayers \$240 dollars per day per student, on average. Moreover, studies show that students who are incarcerated are far more likely to drop out of high school than their peers. Social ties between administrators, teachers, and students help keep our children from getting into trouble in the first place. That's why a number of counties in other states have chosen to impose limits on the number of students whom schools may refer to the court system.

The arrest of a student stigmatizes that child, and it tends to lead to further offenses down the road. The Justice Policy Institute's report showed that nearly 66% of students who return to school after being released from prison drop out after just one year. Young students and even those with disabilities are

affected as well. The Justice Policy Institute's report also points out that students with disabilities are 'four times more likely to be suspected than their peers without disabilities.'

There can also be problems relating to the disproportionate arrest of minority students. According to data collected in greater Hartford in 2006, African Americans students were eight times more likely to be arrested than white students involved in school incidents. In 2007, African American and Hispanic students made up about 85% of student arrests. Ensuring that school districts and law enforcement agencies establish MOU's can help reduce both unwarranted student arrests and the systemic discrimination that has tended to come along with these arrests.

Finally, MOU's help ensure that school resource officers receive the training they need and deserve. The job of an SRO is complicated, requiring training across an array of skill sets. Proper training – which is spelled out in a good MOU – provides the foundation for the invaluable skills an SRO learns once he or she begins working inside a school.

In sum, I hope that this year, as you did last year, you will again join me in supporting this good measure. Passing this legislation will make law enforcement and school policies clearer and, most importantly, it will make our students safer.

Thank you for your consideration; I will be glad to answer any questions you might have.