



Testimony of
Stephen McKeever, First Vice President
AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Public Safety and Security Committee Public Hearing
February 18, 2014

HB 98 An Act Establishing Standards for Public School Security Personnel

Good afternoon Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. My name is Steve McKeever and I serve as First Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing nearly 29,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals and other school personnel. It is on their behalf that I submit this testimony in support of HB 98, An Act Establishing Standards for Public School Security Personnel.

School security has become a priority issue in our state since December 14, 2012. As representatives of the Newtown Federation of Teachers, AFT Connecticut wholeheartedly supported the school security provisions contained in Public Act 13-3 because they provided processes by which another horrific school tragedy might be prevented. With its enactment, we have seen state resources made available to local districts to improve security infrastructures and local districts have convened school safety committees to review and update emergency protocols. These endeavors, in some cases, have included hiring new or additional security personnel on school premises.

Our members support improvements to make certain that schools are safe havens for learning. We are however, concerned that a rush to hire additional security personnel could lead to diluted standards, which could ultimately undermine our best efforts to protect students, teachers and staff.

AFT Connecticut believes strongly that the most qualified school security personnel are those individuals who possess the experience and training municipal or state law enforcement provides. Recognizing that the number of active and retired police officers available to serve in schools is limited, we must create high standards for qualifications and training for suitable candidates that do not have a law enforcement background. Therefore, we strongly support a process to establish minimum qualifications, especially for those individuals who are not current or retired police officers. We also ask you to consider adding stringent requirements for initial and ongoing training for security personnel. Such training should not be limited to external threats, but should also include techniques for responding to students dealing with social and emotional issues and deescalating situations where students and/or staff may threaten or exhibit violent behavior.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 860-257-9782 or smckeever@aftct.org should you have any questions about our position.