

Jennifer Alexander, Chief Executive Officer, ConnCAN  
Testimony to the Joint Judiciary Committee

***HB 5400, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DISCLOSURE OF CERTAIN EDUCATION PERSONNEL, and SB 246, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ZERO-TOLERANCE SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT ACT***

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Good day, Sen. Coleman, Rep. Tong, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening.

My name is Jennifer Alexander and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, better known as ConnCAN. For more a decade, ConnCAN has advocated for student-focused policies that ensure every child, regardless of the color of their skin or the neighborhood they live, can get the great education they need and deserve.

Our schools should always be safe for students, faculty and leaders--that is a basic condition that must be met in order for educators to do their best work and for students to get the best education possible. We believe that these bills will further enforce the need to maintain safe schools and learning environments for our children, teachers and leaders.

That is why I submit this testimony in support of two important bills.

*S.B. 5400, An Act Concerning the Disclosure of Certain Education Personnel Records*, ensures that local boards of education have information about an applicant's record of abuse or sexual misconduct and provides that they share that information with other local boards who may employ such applicant. It requires any applicant to a local school board to state whether they have been convicted of or charged with a crime, as well as submit to criminal background checks prior to being hired by the district. This bill would change the current law, which requires an applicant to inform a local board of criminal activity within 30 days of the offer of employment, to require the applicant to inform prior to employment. This bill proposes common sense policy that will help districts protect staff and students.

*S.B. 246, An Act Concerning the Zero-Tolerance Safe School Environment Act*, increases the penalties for first and second degree threatening when a threat involves a preschool, school or a higher education institution, particularly as pertaining to a crime involving the use of a hazardous substance with the intent to terrorize another person or a crime of violence with the intent to terrorize another person. This bill will help ensure swift and strong responses to threats to student and staff safety and, hopefully, help deter future threats so that our educators, families and children feel safe and protected.

Ensuring that all students--regardless of race, zip code or family income--have the support and opportunities they need to graduate high school ready for the challenges ahead of them in college and career is our number one goal. To meet that goal, we must keep our educators and children safe. That's why I ask you to support H.B. 5400 and 246. We applaud you for your efforts not only to establish an environment of high achievement, but also to ensure our schools are as safe as possible.

Thank you.