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Testimony before the Connecticut Judiciary Committee in SUPPORT of House Bill 5400 and Senate Bill 246 by Mr. Geoff Alswanger, President of the Stamford Board of Education

Chairmen Tong and Coleman, Judiciary Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing me to speak in favor of House Bill 5400 this afternoon.

I am currently the President of the Stamford Board of Education and have served on the board for 5 years. Like any Board of Education, we spend a lot of time dealing with emergencies and trying to improve the public perception of our schools.

In all my Board experience nothing has been as disrupting to our district than a very damaging episode of improper sexual behavior by an employee that has occurred in our schools:

- The harm to a student involved with such conduct is incalculable and long-lasting;
- All students in a school where this kind of event occurs are negatively impacted, both in their sense of personal security and their affection for their place of learning;
- Morale in our entire school system and in our entire community suffers.

Because of their seriousness and also their delicate nature, these events—which occur in many states and localities--are often shrouded in confidentiality or by improper administrative concealment. In fact, an alleged incident in Stamford has been the subject of intense controversy and conjecture yet the only confirmed evidence of its existence is a redacted separation letter posted on the internet.

This embarrassing state of affairs illustrates the need for much more diligence and transparency in hiring decisions within districts and between districts.

School districts like Stamford understand that we have to take action to address any systemic deficiencies. Only then we will be able to heal ourselves if an incident of sexual misconduct occurs. We have worked hard to find ways we can improve our District's conduct and ensuring employees are aware of their absolute responsibilities to protect students.

We have also attempted to lead the way in the State on providing clear direction for the District in terms of not allowing confidentiality agreements or assisting an employee with a positive letter of recommendation in these types of cases where there is probable cause to suspect misconduct. These are included in a new Board Policy currently moving our approval process.

We are grateful to the Legislature for recognizing the importance of this issue. The provisions of HB 5400 will go a long way to helping us assure our students and parents that other districts will not be exporting problems to us. We fully understand, however, that your efforts will not be successful if we don't insist in strict compliance within our own system.

I also would like to express my support for Senate Bill 246, which is very timely for Stamford given our recent experiences.

Thank you.