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James A. Connelly, Interim Superintendent of Schools

March 2, 2016

Joint Committee on Judiciary  
Legislative Office Building, Room 2500  
Hartford, CT 06106

**Re: Testimony for Senate Bill 246 and House Bill 5400**

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Members of the Judicial Committee:

My name is James A. Connelly and I am Interim Superintendent of Schools in Stamford. Thank you for allowing me to offer my strong support for the above-reference bills on behalf of the Stamford School District, and myself. I have been serving as Interim Superintendent in Stamford for two months, and I've also served in several Connecticut districts as either Superintendent or Interim Superintendent during my career.

**House Bill 5400**

I come to you today as a Superintendent who served in at least two Districts that were victimized by hiring predators whose references from previous school districts failed to disclose conduct of a sexual nature with students. Both of these individuals committed felony sexual assault with students in the districts in which I was employed. This resulted in their lengthy imprisonment and loss of their professional certifications. My only recourse during this time was to publicly decry the unethical standards of, and the failure to disclose this conduct by, the school districts where these individuals were previously employed.

It is important to know that the mandates of this proposed bill will prevent these unethical and unprofessional practices of many school districts in the future.

I am proud to tell you that Stamford Board of Education is in the process of enacting a policy that addresses this issue and will be the first school district in Connecticut to have done so. At the same time, I am revamping our personnel practices in Stamford concerning the review and vetting of applicants so that we can prevent the hiring of possible predators.

I applaud the language of this bill, which requires the State Department of Education to develop forms and procedures that will assist us in this hiring process.

Again, this legislation supports a safe school environment and has my complete support and should have the support of all Superintendents of Schools and Boards of Education in our State.

**Senate Bill 246**

I would also like to make brief comments in strong support of Senate Bill 246. As you know, Stamford High School and four other schools in Connecticut were victims of "swatting" on Tuesday, February 9<sup>th</sup>. On February 10<sup>th</sup> the same type of "swatting" happened at Stamford Academy, a local charter school. The Fairfield Public Schools were on a complete district-wide lockdown on October 23<sup>rd</sup> because of a similar incident. All of these situations, in my estimation, were acts of terrorism. Given the national anxiety concerning school safety following incidents (i.e. Columbine and Sandy Hook), this illegal behavior has caused a great emotional harm to the entire school community, including students, staff, and parents.

The damage these incidents cause is far more than just disruptive to the educational process. It causes a deep sense of anxiety and fear that lingers far beyond the time when a school was placed in lockdown or evacuated. A stronger penalty for this type of crime, as proposed in this bill, is deserving of strong support.

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