

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing

March 2, 2016

Testimony of David Martin, Mayor of Stamford, regarding:

- An Act Concerning The Reporting of Injuries Resulting From the Discharge of a Firearm and Stab Wounds (SB244)
- An Act Concerning The Zero-Tolerance Safe School Environment Act (SB246)
- An Act Increasing Penalties for Failure to Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalks and Failure to Exercise Due Care to Avoid Hitting A Pedestrian or Cyclist (HB5403)
- An Act Concerning The Filing of Workers' Compensation Claims When A Municipality Is The Employer (HB5364)
- An Act Concerning Municipal Recovery of Moneys Paid on Behalf of Displaced Tenants (SB245)
- An Act Concerning The Disclosure Of Certain Education Personnel Records (HB5400)

Good Afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for holding a public hearing today in Stamford to allow my Administration and Stamford residents to testify on a number of bills that affect Stamford. I am going to speak about a few bills that will benefit the City and residents of Stamford.

- **Senate Bill 244, *An Act Concerning The Reporting Of Injuries Resulting From The Discharge Of A Firearm And Stab Wounds***

This bill would make the mandatory reporting of stab wounds the same as reporting a wound from a firearm. When there is an incident involving a firearm, chances are that there is a need for a criminal investigation, which is why we have a mandatory reporting law for firearm wounds. Along those same lines, a stab wound is often the result of criminal activity and should be investigated, but without this law that would often go unreported. The reporting of a stab or firearm wound is sometimes the only way law enforcement knows that a criminal act has taken place.

To keep reporting as effective and simple as possible, we don't want there to be one set of rules for reporting a firearm wound and a different set of rules for a stab wound. Therefore, we don't think that the immunity portion of this bill is necessary. There have been few, if any instances where any hospital's reluctance to meet the requirements of the current statute because of a fear of liability or any action that has been brought against a hospital or their staff for negligence in reporting under this section of the statutes.

- Senate Bill 246, *An Act Concerning The Zero-Tolerance Safe School Environment Act*

On February 9, 2016 at around 12:30pm, there was a bomb threat called in to Stamford High School. Almost 40 police officers were called to the scene supported with both Stamford and State Police bomb sniffing dogs. Several Fire and EMS teams also responded and were put on standby in case there was a true emergency. Around 1700 students and 200 staff were evacuated, and eventually sent home. I note that we wasted at least another \$140,000 due to this threat. That is what it costs the city each day to keep Stamford High School open in addition to the direct emergency response cost.

The next day there was another bomb threat called into another Stamford school. This incident required the same emergency services response, school evacuation, and fear and economic cost.

I take these threats seriously, our police take these threats seriously, and the city takes these threats seriously. Incidents like the two Stamford recently experienced divert first responders away from true emergencies and their other important duties. The swift response by our emergency officials also presents a risk to the public with the increased potential for automobile and pedestrian accidents with civilians as law enforcement are responding to the threat.

In response to these two incidents, I have asked state and federal authorities to look at ways to stiffen penalties for people who call in threats to schools or public institutions. The perpetrators are often difficult to catch. And if penalties aren't very severe, some perpetrators may see this as just a fun game. So there should be significant deterrents for making these calls, and I think harsher penalties and restitution to municipalities and the state are part of the solution.

It is appropriate to have increased penalties for bomb threats at schools, but the terror inflicted, and the potential safety and economic ramifications on the community are not limited to schools. A false bomb threat at the State Capitol, or Stamford Government Center, or Bradley Airport, or the Transportation Center, also create fear and safety issues and have economic ramifications on the

community that suggest that penalties should be severe no matter the building being threatened. This is a national issue. Connecticut cannot be the last on this issue. This is where the state can lead, like we did on gun safety.

- House Bill 5403, *An Act Increasing Penalties for Failure to Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalks and Failure to Exercise Due Care to Avoid Hitting A Pedestrian or Cyclist*

I support the increase in penalties for motorists failing to yield to pedestrians and cyclists. Since I became Mayor, we have been working to make crosswalks and bicycle paths safer. We are also actively working to educate motor vehicle operators about sharing the road with pedestrians and cyclists. Despite our continuing efforts, we had two pedestrian deaths last year from automobile accidents. We need to do more and an increase in penalties would add teeth to our efforts.

Like many other large cities, there are a growing number of cyclists and pedestrians in Stamford particularly with the influx of young people to our Downtown and South End neighborhoods. Because of this, there will be even more potentially dangerous interactions between pedestrians/cyclists and motor vehicles. Distracted driving and distracted walking is also increasing which adds another layer to this problem.

Operators of motor vehicles need to be held responsible if they do not appropriately yield to pedestrians or try to exercise care to avoid hitting a cyclist or pedestrian. Interestingly enough, my hope is that we wouldn't need to issue any tickets for this. I believe this legislation itself provides much needed deterrents, and hopefully drivers will be more mindful if they know that there are large fines for not exercising caution when sharing the road. This legislation would help significantly.

- House Bill 5364, *An Act Concerning The Filing Of Workers' Compensation Claims When A Municipality Is The Employer*

Employees who suffer a work-related injury have to report that to the city. But there is no official designation of where claims should go. In some cases the necessary personnel in the city are not receiving the report, whether it is because the supervisor is on vacation or maternity leave, or if the paperwork is misplaced.

We are proposing that workers' compensation claims should be handled like all other claims against the city and be submitted to the Town Clerk. This is a simple, clear process that is easy for everyone to follow. An employee can get a stamped receipt and know that their claim was officially received. This will settle any confusion about when a claim is submitted and help ensure more expeditious processing of the claim.

This bill adds language to current statute to require that a municipal employee shall send a copy of the notice of their workers' compensation claim to their Town Clerk's Office, thus codifying the process for filing a workers' compensation claim. An employee can get a stamped receipt and know that their claim was officially received. This will settle any confusion about when a claim is submitted and help ensure expeditious processing of the claim by the city.

If there is a better and simpler process than what we have proposed, we are willing to consider it.

- **Senate Bill 245, *An Act Concerning Municipal Recovery Of Moneys Paid On Behalf Of Displaced Tenants***

The city of Stamford is required to provide temporary housing for families that are displaced from their apartment or rental housing because it has been deemed unsafe or unsanitary. This often requires the City to put the family into a hotel while their dwelling is being remediated, or in some cases, the family needs assistance finding new, permanent housing. Normally, the City has to front the money to put the tenants in temporary or emergency housing and the landlord is expected to reimburse the City for these temporary housing costs while the rental apartment is being repaired and brought up to code.

But because the current law does not explicitly state that a municipality can use a hotel for temporary housing, landlords often do not pay this expense. And because they don't pay this cost, it reduces their incentive to correct code deficiencies in their rental units. So this omission in the current law not only costs the City to deal with the landlords' housing issues, but it can delay proper resolution of these housing issues.

This bill clarifies the current statute to allow municipalities to house displaced tenants in hotels while the municipality assists the tenant with looking for new housing or while their rental apartment is being repaired and brought up to code. The bill also explicitly states that moneys can be recovered by the city for temporary housing at hotels.

In Stamford, this situation arises about 30 to 40 times a year, and annual cost approaches \$100,000 dollars. We understand that other Cities around the state have had similar issues to Stamford where a dwelling is deemed unsafe and tenants are displaced from their homes.

- House Bill 5400, *An Act Concerning The Disclosure Of Certain Education Personnel Records*

As a parent and as Stamford's Mayor, I take a dim view of "pass the trash" and I want to know that students are safe and that the teachers and administrators hired by the Stamford Public Schools have no background with abuse or misconduct allegations or investigations. I don't want individuals in our school system putting children at risk. And current members of Stamford's Board of Education are of the same opinion. No responsible municipality wants to pass an educator who has allegations or investigations of abuse off to another school district.

The Board of Education is currently working on a policy prohibiting "passing the trash" and new federal statutes require the same. But the current Connecticut Law makes it difficult to ensure that we will not "receive the trash". One of the key challenges is currently when you ask for records for a new hire, you rarely get the type of information laid out in this bill. With the system now, you can't count on getting those records from other school districts and many employers won't provide information other than dates of employment.

This bill is a good solution to start with. A clearly laid out system, as provided in this bill, that all school districts can follow will level the playing field and ensure everyone follows the same rules.