Testimony of Donald E. Williams, Jr., Executive Director
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Before the Education Committee

SB 454 AAC School Security and SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Good afternoon members of the Education Committee. My name is Donald Williams, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association representing Connecticut’s teachers.

In 2013, this legislature provided bi-partisan support for a three-prong approach to school violence: strong gun violence prevention measures, improved school safety, and increased behavioral and mental health services.

The CEA supports SB 454 An Act Concerning School Safety, which continues the program that provides grants to schools for improvements to school safety. The underlying statute was based on the Safe Schools Program, which I supported at this Committee’s public hearing in February, 2007. We modified that legislation in 2013 as part of the state’s response to the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

The CEA also supports and requests an amendment to SB 453 An Act Concerning Classroom Safety and Disruptive Behavior.

In a time of budget cuts it is too easy to abandon the lessons we have learned about behavioral and mental health. Identification of needs and addressing those needs is important for the welfare of all students and schools. This bill helps ensure daily classroom safety, which means a classroom free from assault and physical harm inflicted upon students and teachers. In addition to the other provisions in the bill, we support having no less than one social worker for every 250 students, the ratio recommended nationally.

I would also bring your attention to a proposed amendment I have attached to my testimony:

In Section 1, subsection (c), language is added that would enhance the response to aggressive or violent behavior by outlining appropriate procedures when behavior poses an imminent threat or danger to students and staff, and follow-up by administrators and staff to address the behavior on an ongoing basis.

Section 11 would allow a teacher to remove a student from the classroom who has assaulted someone in the classroom, repeatedly bullied other students, or is a threat to the safety of others, and place the
AN ACT CONCERNING CLASSROOM SAFETY AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR.
(Additional new language is in *italics*, Section 1, subparagraph (c), on page 4, below, and Section 11, on page 10, below)

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 10-222d of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof *(Effective July 1, 2018)*:

(a) As used in this section [] and sections 10-222g to 10-222i, inclusive, and section 10-222k, inclusive, as amended by this act:

1. "Bullying" means (A) the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district, or (B) a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district, that: (i) Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student’s property, (ii) places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for such student, (iv) infringes on the rights of such student at school, or (v) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. "Bullying" shall include, but not be limited to, a written, oral or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics;

2. "Cyberbullying" means any act of bullying through the use of the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, cellular mobile telephone or other mobile electronic devices or any electronic communications;

3. "Teen dating violence" means any act of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including stalking, harassing and threatening, that occurs between two students who are currently in or who have recently been in a dating relationship;

4. "Mobile electronic device" means any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more individuals, including, but not limited to, a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, a laptop computer, equipment that is capable of playing a video game or a digital video disk, or equipment on which digital images are taken or transmitted;
such investigation has commenced, (5) require the safe school climate specialist to review any anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report, (6) include a prevention and intervention strategy, as defined by section 10-222g, as amended by this act, for school employees to deal with bullying and teen dating violence, (7) provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying and daily classroom safety, (8) require each school to notify the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying or violations of daily classroom safety and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed not later than forty-eight hours after the completion of the investigation described in subdivision (4) of this subsection, (9) require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student against whom such act was directed to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed and policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying, (10) require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying or violation of daily classroom safety to a meeting, separate and distinct from the meeting required in subdivision (9) of this subsection, to discuss specific interventions undertaken by the school to prevent further acts of bullying or violations of daily classroom safety, (11) establish a procedure for each school to document and maintain records relating to reports and investigations of bullying or violations of daily classroom safety in such school and to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying or violations of daily classroom safety in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and annually report such number to the Department of Education, and in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education, (12) direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated violations of daily classroom safety or incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include [both] counseling, mental health services and discipline, (13) prohibit discrimination and retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying, (14) direct the development of student safety support plans for students against whom an act of bullying was directed that address safety measures the school will take to protect such students against further acts of bullying, (15) require the principal of a school, or the principal's designee, to notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency when such principal, or the principal's designee, believes that any acts of bullying or violations of daily classroom safety constitute criminal conduct, (16) prohibit bullying (A) on school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the local or regional board of education, and (B) outside of the school setting if such bullying (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, or (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school, (17) require, at the beginning of each school year, each school to provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district's safe school climate plan, and (18) require that all school employees annually complete the training described in section 10-220a or section 10-222j, as amended by this act. The notification
this act, and emergency response procedures at each school. Parents, teachers and high school students shall be included in the membership of such committees.

Sec. 3. Section 10-222h of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2018):

(a) The Department of Education shall, within available appropriations, (1) document school districts' articulated needs for technical assistance and training related to safe learning, daily classroom safety and bullying, (2) collect information on the prevention and intervention strategies used by schools to reduce the incidence of bullying, improve school climate and improve reporting outcomes, (3) develop or recommend model safe school climate plans for grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, and (4) in collaboration with the Connecticut Association of Schools, disseminate to all public schools grade-level appropriate school climate assessment instruments, approved by the department, to be used by local and regional boards of education for the purposes of collecting information described in subdivision (2) of this subsection so that the department can monitor efforts to prevent bullying [prevention efforts] and ensure daily classroom safety over time and compare each district's progress to state trends. Such school climate assessment instruments shall (A) include surveys that contain uniform grade-level appropriate questions that collect information about students' perspectives and opinions about the school climate at the school, and (B) allow students to complete and submit such assessment and survey anonymously.

(b) (1) On or before February 1, 2014, and annually thereafter, the department shall, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, submit a report on the status of its efforts pursuant to this section including, but not limited to, the number of verified acts of bullying in the state, an analysis of the responsive action taken by school districts, an analysis of student responses on the uniform grade-level appropriate questions described in subdivision (4) of subsection (a) of this section and any recommendations it may have regarding additional activities or funding to prevent bullying in schools and improve school climate to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education and children and to the speaker of the House of Representatives, the president pro tempore of the Senate and the majority and minority leaders of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

(2) On or before February 1, 2020, and annually thereafter, the department shall, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, submit a report on the status of its efforts pursuant to this section including, but not limited to, the number of verified acts of bullying and violations of daily classroom safety in the state, an analysis of the responsive action taken by school districts, an analysis of student responses on the uniform grade-level appropriate questions described in subdivision (4) of subsection (a) of this section and any recommendations it may have regarding additional activities or funding to prevent bullying in schools, ensure daily classroom safety and improve school climate to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education and children and to the speaker of
identifying youths at risk of suicide and developmentally appropriate strategies for effective interventions to prevent youth suicide. Such training may be presented in person by mentors, offered in state-wide workshops or through on-line courses.

Sec. 6. Section 10-222k of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2018):

(a) For the school year commencing July 1, [2012] 2018, and each school year thereafter, the superintendent of each local or regional board of education shall appoint, from among existing school district staff, a district safe school climate coordinator. The district safe school climate coordinator shall: (1) Be responsible for implementing the district’s safe school climate plan, developed pursuant to section 10-222d, as amended by this act, (2) collaborate with the safe school climate specialists, described in subsection (b) of this section, the board of education for the district and the superintendent of schools of the school district to prevent, identify and respond to bullying and violations of daily classroom safety in the schools of the district, (3) provide data and information, in collaboration with the superintendent of schools of the district, to the Department of Education regarding bullying and daily classroom safety, in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of section 10-222d, as amended by this act, and subsection (a) of section 10-222h, as amended by this act, and (4) meet with the safe school climate specialists at least twice during the school year to discuss issues relating to bullying and daily classroom safety in the school district and to make recommendations concerning amendments to the district’s safe school climate plan.

(b) For the school year commencing July 1, 2012, and each school year thereafter, the principal of each school, or the principal’s designee, shall serve as the safe school climate specialist and shall (1) investigate or supervise the investigation of reported acts of bullying in the school in accordance with the district’s safe school climate plan, (2) collect and maintain records of reports and investigations of bullying in the school, and (3) act as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying and responding to reports of bullying in the school.

(c) (1) For the school year commencing July 1, 2012, and each school year thereafter, the principal of each school shall establish a committee or designate at least one existing committee in the school to be responsible for developing and fostering a safe school climate and addressing issues relating to bullying and daily classroom safety in the school. Such committee shall include at least one parent or guardian of a student enrolled in the school appointed by the school principal.

(2) Any such committee shall: (A) Receive copies of completed reports following investigations of bullying or violations of daily classroom safety, (B) identify and address patterns of bullying or acts that violate daily classroom safety among students in the school, (C) implement the provisions of the school security and safety plan, developed pursuant to section 10-222m, regarding the collection, evaluation and reporting of information relating to instances of disturbing or threatening behavior that may not meet the definition of bullying or daily classroom safety, (D) review and amend school policies relating to bullying and daily classroom
10-222m, and (10) a requirement that the school security and safety plan for each school provide an orientation on such school security and safety plan to each school employee, as defined in section 10-222d, as amended by this act, at such school and provide violence prevention training in a manner prescribed in such school security and safety plan. The Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection shall make such standards available to local officials, including local and regional boards of education.

Sec. 8. Section 10-222g of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2018):

For the purposes of section 10-222d, as amended by this act, the term "prevention and intervention strategy" may include, but is not limited to, (1) implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for safe school climate or for ensuring daily classroom safety and the prevention of bullying and teen dating violence identified by the Department of Education, (2) school rules prohibiting acts that violate daily classroom safety, bullying, teen dating violence, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts, (3) adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying or teen dating violence is likely to occur, (4) inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying and teen dating violence education and prevention curricula in kindergarten through high school, (5) individual interventions with the child who violates daily classroom safety, the bully, parents and school employees, and interventions with the bullied child, parents and school employees, (6) school-wide training related to safe school climate, (7) student peer training, education and support, (8) promotion of parent involvement in prevention of acts that violate daily classroom safety and bullying [prevention] through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions, [and] (9) culturally competent school-based curriculum focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation, and (10) mental health services for children whose acts violate daily classroom safety. Funding for the school-based bullying intervention and school climate improvement strategy may originate from public, private, federal or philanthropic sources. For purposes of this section, "interventions with the bullied child" includes referrals to a school counselor, psychologist or other appropriate social or mental health service, and periodic follow-up by the safe school climate specialist with the bullied child.

Sec. 9. (NEW) (Effective July 1, 2018) Each local and regional board of education shall maintain a school social worker to student ratio for the school district as follows: One school social worker to two hundred fifty students.

Sec. 10. Section 10-233g of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2018):

(a) Where there is a physical assault made by a student upon a teacher or other school employee on school property or in performance of school duties and such teacher or employee