



TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE BIPARTISAN TASK FORCE
ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SAFETY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCHOOL SAFETY
JANUARY 25, 2013

Sen. Boucher, Rep. Fleischmann, and members of the Task Force's Subcommittee on School Safety, my name is Lara Herscovitch; I am the deputy director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, a statewide, nonprofit organization working to reduce the number of children and youth entering the juvenile and criminal justice system, and advocating a safe, effective and fair system for those involved. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My testimony today focuses on the issue of police officers stationed inside schools. The Alliance respects the challenging work of law enforcement and we understand that some School Resource Officers can be a positive influence within a school. However, the national consensus among policy researchers is that police in schools do not increase physical safety, and in fact, often bring numerous negative, unintended consequences. The Alliance believes that limited resources at the state and local level would be better spent instead increasing personnel like school social workers and psychologists, while looking at physical plant safety through things like limiting the number of entrances, buzzer systems with cameras, school-wide emergency alert systems, bulletproof glass, etc.

Nationally, the increased presence of police officers in schools has increased the number students being arrested. This is not because student behavior is different than in previous years; indeed, very few of these arrests are for serious or violent offenses. We regularly hear cases of *arrest* as a response to such minor misbehavior as school policy violations (like dress code), smoking, talking back, schoolyard fights, and so on – the kinds of things you and I used to be sent to the principal's office for. When schools turn to police officers to handle student discipline, these same misbehaviors end up referred to court as “disorderly conduct,” “breach of peace” and “assault.” Some of the more absurd examples include arrest of a fifth grade child for giving another child a wedgie; of a very young child for having a temper tantrum; of a kid smoking a cigarette. It is not only an ineffective way to discipline students, but it is expensive and undermines school climate as well as youth-police relationships. To try and slow the arrests for this kind of minor misbehavior, the Connecticut Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division, after collecting student arrest data for the past year and a half, sent a letter to every police chief and superintendent, re-asserting its authority to return referrals that are for minor offenses that are “typical adolescent behavior.”

We realize that many districts already have school resource officers in place. Where that is the case, we strongly recommend two things be in place:

First, a memorandum of agreement between the school district and police department that clearly outlines roles and responsibilities. The state's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, within the Office of Policy and Management, together with educators, police and others, researched and developed a model MOA that includes a “graduated response model,” clarifies what misbehaviors should be handled (A) by teachers in classrooms, (B) with administrators, (C) with personnel like social workers and psychologists, and finally, only in serious cases, (D) with law enforcement. National experts, like the National Juvenile Justice Network have recommended this approach, and CT communities using it have seen

remarkable decreases in arrests without compromising safety. Last year, legislation was proposed to mandate the adoption of such an MOA if a district has police stationed in its schools. It also outlined student arrest data collection and reporting requirements. The legislation received no fiscal note and passed through the Judiciary and Education committees, but ran out of time on the floor. We urge you to recommend similar legislation this year.

Second, training is of critical importance, for police officers as well as school personnel. President Obama, in his proposals, called for the Department of Justice to develop and districts to follow "best practices" for school resource officer training and use in schools. I add school personnel because they also need training in identification of serious mental illness, including, for example, when to refer to Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) instead of law enforcement. EMPS is a great resource that can be strengthened and utilized more often. Training for officers, in addition, gives them the tools they need to effectively work with children, youth and adolescents in a school setting. This training can include adolescent development, de-escalation techniques with children, signs of trauma / acting out, and the like. Asking police officers who are not trained in child development, classroom management or other educational tenets to be effective members of a school environment is not fair to them or the school. The JJAC offers such training free of charge.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions now or at your convenience.

Alliance member organizations:

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI Children's Community Programs, Connecticut Association for Human Services, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI-CT and the Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children

Research Examples:

- United States Government Accountability Office, *COPS Grants Were a Modest Contributor to Declines in Crime in the 1990s* (October 2005). www.gao.gov/highlights/d06104high.pdf
- National Center for Education Statistics, "Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2010," Table 2.1: Number of student-reported nonfatal crimes ages 12 – 18 and rate of crimes per 1,000 students, by location, type of crime, and year: 1992-2008. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/iscs10.pdf> and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics, "Local Police Departments, 1997," "Local Police Departments, 2000," "Local Police Departments, 2003," and Local Police Departments, 2007" <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=71> Note: SRO numbers only available for 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2007. Rates of incidents of theft or violence at school are for the 1996-1997, 1999-2000, 2002-2003, and 2006-2007 school years.
- Christopher J. Schreck, J. Mitchell Miller and Chris L. Gibson, "Trouble in the School Yard: A Study of the Risk Factors of Victimization at School," *Crime and Delinquency* 49(2003).
- National Center for Education Statistics, "Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2010," Table 2.1: Number of student-reported nonfatal crimes ages 12 – 18 and rate of crimes per 1,000 students, by location, type of crime, and year: 1992-2008. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/iscs10.pdf>