

First let me express my gratitude for the opportunity to submit this testimony during these important hearings. The process of public hearings on this important subject demonstrates that we are considerate and thoughtful. I only hope these hearings will truly be a place for honesty, open mindedness and attentive deliberation. I am still concerned that many of the “solutions” being considered are forgone in so many minds and they will not be subject to fair hearing. Please allay my concern by putting aside political posturing and carefully consider all input regardless of sentiment.

As part of the process these three groups should ultimately combine efforts if any hope for an effective solution is to be found. If there is anything to be learned from Sandy Hook it is that there is no panacea. The answers are multifaceted and span many areas including one that does not seem to be represented here, our society. For that reason I am addressing this testimony to all three committees, with committee specific sections for your consideration as members of the forums and as part of the general assembly.

School Security and Safety

The efforts in this area should focus on creating a strong deterrent and making classrooms safer. I have seen a number of proposals and actions locally that do make sense but could go much farther. The following are good ideas that we really should have done long ago:

1. Make our schools security stronger by creating a strong deterrent against criminal action. The vulnerability of schools was evidenced most vividly by Columbine first and then further by subsequent school attacks. Discretely armed guards with radios in all schools should be required and we should look hard again at metal detectors especially in the higher grades. It must be abundantly clear to all evildoers that failure is inevitable if they target our schools.
2. Reinforce the deterrent by allowing responsible school employees to carry their private firearms. Provide intensive training when desired to increase effectiveness. We trust them with our children, why can we not trust them to defend them in a crisis?
3. Make the classrooms safer with locks and escape routes. For any new school require an alternate escape route from each classroom and consider retrofitting old schools. Commercial buildings are required to have two exits in each room why should schools be any different? Install locks on every door that can only be opened with a key from the outside. Install panic alarms in every classroom with an uplink to the police. This combined with the guards’ radios will reduce the response time and increase police effectiveness.

Mental Health

Violence of any kind is atrocious, with rare exception it is driven by criminal intent. The murders we see in our cities must be discouraged with stronger penalties, up to and including the death penalty. The madness of Sandy Hook, Columbine, VA Tech, and others is an issue unto itself. These events have been perpetrated by young men being

treated for mental illness. It has been widely reported that these individuals were taking SSRIs, SNIs or the like, or had recently stopped taking them immediately before their horrific crimes. These drugs are being prescribed at historic levels to our children some as young as 8. Their side effects are so serious that the FDA requires the highest level of warnings possible to be issued with these medications. The real problem here is that really knows if a patient will become suicidal or experience mania (known side effects) until they are prescribed but there is no standard for monitoring their use.

These drugs have the capacity to cause a patient to become dissociative and are shown to cause cognitive disorders resulting in a loss of contact with reality yet they seem to be prescribed almost casually. It will take some work but the guidelines for proper administration and monitoring need to be developed. Doctors who prescribe them need to be held accountable for their actions if there is not proper follow-up.

“Mania or hypomania is a possible side effect. Users with some type of bipolar disorder are at a much higher risk, however SSRI-induced mania in patients previously diagnosed with unipolar depression can trigger a bipolar episode; however, according to DSM IV-TR, the diagnosis of bipolar disorder requires that the individuals symptoms must not stem from medication side effects, toxins, drug abuse, or another general medical condition.” (source wikipedia)

In the quoted text is another part of the mental health concern. Prescribing psychotropic drugs to certain patients can and has had devastating consequences. The state needs to get serious about treating mental illness once again. We did have a system many years ago that while imperfect, was an effective method of limiting public exposure for the extremely small portion of the population with dangerous mental illness. That system is all but gone. It is clear that our modern experiment of outpatient treatment and halfway houses that were implemented in its place have categorically failed. There needs to be a place for patients with these significant mental disorders to be treated with limited or no exposure to general society. We cannot turn our back on them any longer; they need help as do their families.

Societal Violence

With regard to the fourth unaddressed issue, our violent society, there does not seem to be any interest in addressing this problem. Violence in our society can be squarely blamed on the influences of the media sensationalizing horrible events, video games targeted at our most vulnerable impressionable, and the lack of respect for one another which I contribute to bad parenting. We may not be able to do much about the later but certainly more effort needs to be focused on the media content our youngsters are immersed in daily from the TV and their video games. This is an important piece of the puzzle and should not be overlooked.

Gun Control

No one wants criminals or the insane to have access to guns. Connecticut laws already do as much as can be expected to ensure that does not happen. Existing gun laws should be left in place and do not need augmentation. The facts are clear in this area:

1. Criminals do not obey the laws be they old or new.
2. Gun control never achieves what it is intended to do but it always manages to harass and criminalize law abiding citizens.
3. Reducing availability of guns does not make people safer, it makes them less so, as shown by countless studies conducted over the years showing that wherever there is strict gun control violent crime is at its highest.

We already have very strict gun control laws in this state and everything being proposed right now will have zero effect in preventing another Sandy Hook like tragedy. The solution to criminal gun violence is stronger deterrent through stiffer penalties and an armed populace. There is however one change that has promise to make a difference in the future. It would not have changed the outcome at Sandy Hook but such madness cannot be legislated. In my research I discovered that most mental disorders can be detected in young people between the ages of 18 and 24. We should consider setting the minimum age for purchasing any weapon commensurate with this data.

Conclusion

Gun owners are statistically the most law abiding citizens of all. They are tired of being blamed, demonized and punished for atrocities they did not commit. It is certain that there is not one who believes that criminals and mentally unstable people should have weapons. It must be noted that in Sandy Hook the state could not get out of its own way to help the family with their sick child. The perpetrator murdered his mother in cold blood and stole her weapons. No gun control law exists that could dissuade such madness and future one will either. This issue must be viewed for what it is, mental illness.

We are at a crossroads. We can choose tired out of date approaches that will worsen the overall situation or we can step up and attack the real issues. In this complex problem let us consider that in so many of these cases individual madness linked to psychotropic drugs should be analyzed unremittingly as a cause. I want Connecticut to be the shining example on the hill. We have that opportunity to show intelligence and civility instead of intimidation and impetuosity. Avoid patronizing the special interests with their ineffectual solutions and attack this problem for what it is or it is destined to repeat. I sincerely hope that the promise of receptiveness and introspection rings true in our state.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Dudley

50 Dewey Ave

Milford, CT

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