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Association**

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Testimony from Mark Waxenberg, CEA Executive Director

*before the Subgroup on School Security of the Bipartisan Task
Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety*

January 25, 2013

Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and other members of this working group, thank you for this opportunity to participate in this morning's panel discussion. We look forward to working with state lawmakers and local communities in a collaborative effort to address the critical issue of school safety. Every parent, every child, and every educator should regard schools as safe sanctuaries.

The senseless tragedy in Newtown was a tipping point and galvanization for action. As teachers, we grieve for the children killed, their families, and the heroic educators who gave their lives trying to protect their students. Now more than ever Connecticut needs to do what is necessary to make sure every child in our state's public schools has a safe and secure learning environment.

The time is now for policymakers and communities to work together to keep our children safe and reduce the incidence of gun violence in our communities. Let me say at the outset that there does not seem to be a one-size-fits-all approach to school safety. As you are doing today, state policymakers need to listen to ideas advanced by students, educators, parents and others in our communities and also ensure that localities have the resources necessary to implement new practices. We need to open lines of communication and, above all, ensure that public schools are places where teachers can safely educate, nurture, and inspire our students.

An immediate action that can be taken is the formation of School Safety Committees in each and every school. Preparation and preparedness are paramount. Clearly, local communities should be able to choose the safety measures for their schools as they see fit. But the legislature would show leadership acting swiftly and providing models that schools could review, edit and adopt.

We don't believe you can address school safety without enacting tougher gun laws, for example, banning the sale and possession of military-style semi-automatic weapons as well of high-capacity magazine clips. We also think a new vision of school safety focuses on truly preventive measures such as anti-bullying programs and greater access to mental health services as well as the modern infrastructure, training and programs that will ensure safe learning environments.

In addition, we urge you not to minimize the fact that more school counselors, social workers and psychologists are needed so that educators and families can identify problems and intervene before it's too late. Even though state dollars are limited, your work on this new state task force provides a key opportunity to reassess priorities and determine how state dollars are invested in public education.

In closing, we need to heed the lessons of Sandy Hook. There is no greater challenge than ensuring that our schools are safe havens and that a mass fatality never again occurs in our state. If you need a North Star to guide your work, consider the words of President Obama. He called our first task as a society: to keep our children safe.