

Dear Senators and Representatives,

First, thank you for organizing this task force, and for participating in this working group. It is heartening to see that out of the tragedy in Newtown, there comes swift action in response.

I am the mother of two children, including a 6-year old elementary school student. We recently moved to Guilford from New Haven, and the events in Newtown resonated way too close to home. One of the motivations for our move was safety: we love our neighborhood in New Haven, but there had been a recent spate of muggings, first-floor break-ins, and altercations on the streets involving weapons, and we moved to rural Guilford thinking it would be a safer environment for our family. The Sandy Hook community and school are strikingly similar to our new situation, and it was profoundly eye-opening: we are all equally safe or unsafe; we are all in this together; as Dr. King said, "We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." I bring this up because while the Sandy Hook tragedy is uniquely and profoundly shocking, and has rightly catalyzed us all to action, we need to also keep in mind the slow-motion massacres happening in our state's cities, and the sense of insecurity children and parents experience on a daily basis in certain neighborhoods.

As for what this means in terms of school security, interestingly, I'm not actually sure how much of an issue that is generally. I certainly don't know the whole situation, but from what I've heard, it sounds like Sandy Hook Elementary was following all possible safety precautions (buzzer at the door, door locked during the day, etc). What happened was a horrible, horrific, unimaginable, non-sensical, anomalous tragedy. I believe that the answer to school safety lies more with the mental health and gun control groups in a case like this-- to have armed guards or constant police presence at schools only fosters a sense of INsecurity. For schools where there is a history of internal violence or the presence of weapons, that is a different situation. I'm sorry to say I don't have a solution to suggest; it's necessary to take steps to keep kids safe (I heard from teachers about girls getting mugged by peers in the bathroom of Wilbur Cross High in New Haven), but I think that as we consider the topic of "school safety," we have to think about the whole day, the whole community; and so I believe that "school safety" needs to take into account things like safe spaces for kids to hang out AFTER school; considerations of transportation home from after-school activities, if kids or parents are afraid of walking; and also generally promoting a culture of empathy and mutual respect and responsibility in all schools across the state, so we ALL feel like we are ALL in it together, like we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, whether that's in our own classroom, our own building, our own town, or as a wider community of school children, teachers, and parents.

That sounds extremely lofty and ambiguous, but there are concrete programs that address just such topics. There is the "[responsive classroom](#)" movement, in use in various schools already in the state, including Ridge Hill Elementary in North Haven; and mindfulness is being increasingly taught in schools as a tool to develop concentration, foster empathy, and promote self-control. I have taken a training program with the organization called [Mindful Schools](#), and would be happy to come and talk to the working group about the goals and results of such programs, and/or help put together a coalition of mindfulness teachers to help develop a pilot program for the state.

Thank you again for your work on this task force, thank you for your attention to my statement, and I look forward to learning of the results of your findings. Meanwhile, if it would be of interest to you to hear more about mindfulness in schools, please don't hesitate to contact me at this e-mail address, or by telephone: (203) 464-8846.

Respectfully,
Meg Furniss Weisberg
Guilford