

**Patricia A. Kukor, LCSW
Portland, CT**

**Testimony for the Sub-Committees of the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence
Prevention and Children's Safety**

*(Please submit this testimony to all three sub-committees of the task force - Gun
Violence, School Security and Mental Health)*

I have been a Master's level social worker for nearly 29 years. For 12 years, I worked at a residential facility in Connecticut for adolescent boys, working with youth after they had experienced years of failure at home, at school and/or in their communities. Sadly, some of these young men were not able to sustain the gains they made and have been incarcerated. Others have, tragically, died at a very young age, through violence or by taking their own lives. On the other hand, many resilient young men are now contributing members of society, with families of their own. It was my great honor to attend the graduation of one of my former students from the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis. He is an officer in the United States Marines, serving his country.

For nearly 17 years, I have worked as a School Social Worker in a public school setting, working with elementary school students, with the opportunity to intervene with them at a young age. I work side-by-side with teachers, psychologists, nurses, administrators, parents and community providers, striving to remove social-emotional barriers to learning. Students today are impacted by a myriad of factors that may negatively affect their mental health, and hence, their educational experience. These factors include, but are not limited to economic status, violence, death, abandonment, social and behavioral difficulties and complex trauma. Social Workers are uniquely trained to intervene with individuals and groups within the context of their environments. My role as a School Social Worker, like that of hundreds of my colleagues across the state and the country, includes, crisis intervention, home visits, individual and group counseling, providing class lessons, developing behavior plans, assessing students and families who are referred for Special Education and Related Services, consultation with teachers and staff, referring to and collaborating with community providers and working with the school team to develop school-wide positive behavioral supports.

For several years, I have also been a member of the Board of the Connecticut Association of School Social Workers and I am a member of the School Social Worker Association of America and the National Association of Social Workers. At the state and national level, these organizations seek to promote the profession of School Social Work in order to enhance the social and emotional growth and academic outcomes of all students. As we respond to the horrible tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, we seek to work with our administrators and colleagues to increase our ability to help prevent school violence, improve school safety and address the rising number of mental health issues our students face. We aspire to be an integral part of connecting schools,

families and communities. I strongly support the call to improve mental health services in our schools and to insure that every school in Connecticut has at least one full time social worker.

We must be relentless in protecting our children from harm and improving the mental health of all students in order to enhance academic and social-emotional success.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Kukor, LCSW
School Social Worker
Board Member of the CT. Association of School Social Workers
Member of School Social Work Association of America
Member of National Association of Social Workers