

TESTIMONY of Peter Tacy, Executive Director Emeritus, Connecticut Association of Independent Schools

Ensuring that all schools are safe places for children and those who are teaching and caring for children is a necessity in any decent society. I applaud you for examining this issue. However, I also strongly encourage the committee to ignore deceptive and divisive “solutions” that are being presented by interested parties regarding school safety — and above all, to keep in mind that what you do in any school will have educational as well as public-safety consequences.

The over-arching problem highlighted by the Newtown murders is the massive abundance in our society of the kinds of weapons used in that catastrophe. We must either accept the need to drastically reduce the availability of weapons intended only to maim and kill people, or we will have to accept the moral and social consequences of an evasion of responsibility that will be utterly shameful.

Unless the problem of the nation and our state being awash in weapons of massive lethality is courageously addressed by lawmakers, no real answer to the “core” school-safety challenge can ever be made. Guns are not extrinsic to this problem. They cannot be excluded from a solution.

However, three small steps should be a part of any comprehensive solution you devise. In addition, one that’s been loudly recommended absolutely should not.

- Affordable technology exists that would enable offsite law-enforcement personnel to remotely monitor and communicate with all Connecticut schools. This should be installed universally. If banks can have this protection, schools certainly should.
- Existing laws regarding “weapons exclusion zones” at and near schools need to be more actively enforced and brought to greater public awareness with boundary signage, etc. It’s no secret that law-enforcement efforts in this area have been lax.
- Most school accreditation standards include a requirement for preparation of emergency / disaster plans for each school. Often these are developed without any consultation beyond the school itself. Accreditors should be urged to mandate that local law-enforcement and emergency-medical providers be actively involved in the creation and dissemination of these plans.

Finally, you must firmly resist suggestions (such as those from the N.R.A.) that adding armed police to school campuses is in any credible way a safety “solution.” In merely tactical terms, it is not, as the Columbine shootings showed. But what this step would also do is markedly diminish the ability of schools to model through what the visible adults do how all adults in a responsible, caring, secure society behave, and what that feels like. Turning schools into armed camps will not only be an ineffective approach to physical safety, but it will be terribly corrosive educationally. Don’t go there.

Postscript: These remarks are my own views and not necessarily reflective of the CAIS