



**Richard Smith**  
**First Selectman, Town of Deep River**  
**Before the**  
**Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety**  
**School Security Working Group**  
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As a result of the horrifying tragedy in Newtown, communities across the nation are meeting to discuss ways of improving school security and protecting our children, teachers and staff. In speaking with my colleagues from around the state, they have suggested that the state needs to address the following issues to help enhance school safety:

**School Security Funding**

Due to budgetary concerns, state and federal funding for school security has declined since 2008. Although Connecticut established a school security grant program under Public Act 07-208, funding for the program was cut a few years later. As a result, many school districts have used a "cut and paste" approach to funding school security measures, funding one project one year but cutting back the next year to address other educational priorities.

COST recommends that funding be restored to the SAFE Schools Grant Program, which:

- Provides competitive grants to school districts to improve security infrastructure in schools, install security systems in primary entryways, purchase portable security devices, and train school personnel to use the devices and the infrastructure;
- Requires school districts applying for grants for new school construction or major alterations to include security infrastructure for any entrances involved in the project plans; and
- Requires districts requesting grants to 1) conduct a uniform security assessment of its school entrances and any security infrastructure; (2) develop and implement, with the input of emergency responders, an emergency plan; and 3) periodically practice the emergency plan.

**In addition to funding issues, communities have discussed the need to incorporate the following in any plan to enhance school security:**

**Assessment** - Many schools have implemented some school security measures. However, each school should be conduct a uniform security assessment to pinpoint security vulnerabilities.

**Flexibility** - Although there should be minimum school security parameters for all schools, school officials need the flexibility to tailor school security plans to address their district's specific needs.

**Consistency** – School related policies and procedures must be consistently enforced. Too often, Access Control systems which are used to ensure that intruders cannot enter the school, are undermined because doors are propped open for a variety of reasons, such as convenience or ventilation.

**Training** – Staff training regarding emergency response policies must be conducted on a regular basis, including training for substitute teachers and support staff. Training should be incorporated into existing professional development requirements to ensure that school districts are not faced with increased costs.

**Portable Classrooms** – Several towns have identified specific issues relative to portable classrooms, which are widely used to provide additional classroom space. School security funding should be provided to districts to address security issues involving portable classrooms and, where feasible, move students into main school buildings.

**School Climate** – Although another task force is reviewing mental health issues, it is important to continue to assist districts in fostering a school climate that does not tolerate bullying and aggressive behaviors and that encourages people to report any suspicious behavior to school and/or local authorities.

**Partnership with State and Local Emergency Personnel** – Many towns are asking local and state police, fire, EMS, emergency management and fire marshals to familiarize themselves with the school and staff and help develop recommendations for improving school security and safety. Encouraging communities to partner with emergency responders on school security initiatives builds a foundation for effective security policies.

**School Resource Officers** – Many communities have cut back on the use of School Resource Officers due to budget cuts. An SRO is specifically trained to perform three roles: law enforcement officer; law-related counselor; and law-related education teacher. Opportunities to assist school districts in funding SROs should be identified.

**Qualifications of School Security Consultants** – The state should develop qualifications to ensure that school security consultants are properly trained and have school security expertise. Under current law, security companies are not required to be licensed or registered with the state.

**Safe Schools – Not Fortresses** – School security initiatives must ensure the safety of our students and school personnel without becoming fortresses.

Clearly, these are difficult issues and we appreciate the opportunity to comment.

COST stands ready to assist committee members in developing thoughtful, realistic recommendations to enhance school security and safety.

Thank you.

**Connecticut Council of Small Towns**  
1245 Farmington Avenue, 101 West Hartford, CT 06107  
Tel. 860-676-0770 Fax. 860-676-2662