

**Testimony to the School Security Working Group of the
Bi-Partisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety - January 25, 2013**

My name is Sheila McCreven and I am an elected Board of Education member in Woodbridge, as well as a member of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) Board of Directors, where I also serve as an Area Director for the New Haven region.

In the Woodbridge school district we have an excellent, well thought-out, and well-drilled emergency plan which has been in place well before 2001. I want to stress that our plan is locally-developed, continuously evolving, and flexible to accommodate our particular needs at the same time as we adhere to best practice procedures developed nationally.

We are mindful of the emotional needs of young students and are very careful to insure we do not unnecessarily frighten students as we conduct regular drills of our Emergency Plan, and deliver instruction about both school and personal safety. Our students are in grades Pre-K through six only. Woodbridge is a small, one-school district.

Under the leadership of our Superintendent, we brought our School Safety Committee members to the daylong School Security Symposium that was held January 7th where we heard a wealth of best practice advice for improving our Emergency Plan from experts who came from across the nation to assist all Connecticut schools in the aftermath of Sandy Hook. A key take-away for Woodbridge is the need to adopt National Incident Management System (NIMS), and especially Incident Command protocols designed for 'All Hazard' scenarios, as recommended by the 9/11 Commission Report. This has already been figured out nationally; it is ready to be implemented here.

In Woodbridge we will be coordinating with -- and relying heavily on the law enforcement and public safety expertise of -- our local Police Department. Our public school system does not have this expertise, but our police force does. Several years ago, our Board of Education briefly employed security guards in our school, a practice which was not sustainable due to the strain it put on our operating budget. For now, our DARE Program officer has been assigned from part-time to full-time coverage at our school. We will be exploring a transition to an SRO form of coverage which we will modify to fit an elementary school setting and seek to retain local control by creating a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between our school district and our Police Department. CABE recently sponsored a very informative workshop on the subject of the need for MOUs when SROs are deployed in public schools, and there are best-practice resources available.

We will aim to qualify for grant funding we are told is available as part of federal Homeland Security initiatives, and through existing programs with the state. It is my understanding that adoption of NIMS-complaint Emergency Plans is required to get in line for federal funding and this, in my view, will indeed help ensure best practice and avoid efforts to "reinvent the wheel" while allowing for local control and flexibility, which we are told is built-in to NIMS.

Lastly, I'd like to particularly urge the sub-committee to support proposed bill 5400, introduced by Reps. Davis and Maroney, to increase availability of state funding for security improvements to public schools. Woodbridge is in the process of proposing a major school renovation project and our building committee charge has just this week been expanded to incorporate where possible the inclusion of security improvements, such as a reconfigured entryway that leads only into the main office, door enunciators to enhance our security system, and the possibility of using security glass for doors and ground floor windows. These are aspects of what's known as CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design); again, another set of nationally-recognized best practices, completely thought-out and ready for adoption here.

But funding from the state to help defray these and the many other costs associated with this new, seemingly more dangerous world our children inhabit would be greatly appreciated, I think by every community in our state. Thank you.