

Testimony I wish to give at Newtown HS on January 30th.

My name is Tom Swetts and I teach in this space that you are all sharing with me tonight. On December 14th at 9:30 in the morning I was conducting a class in here with 27 students. At the time my students and I were helping rearrange things for an event much like they did this morning for this event. I was actually outside moving chairs from the stage to right here to the pit where I'm talking to you from. As I reached the front door security told me there was a lock-down and it WAS real. As I entered the auditorium from the back my students were already following the directions of my assistant students and placing themselves in the chair rows and lying down on the cold concrete floor. I remember it was freezing in here. I placed myself on the stage away from the students realizing that if anybody came in I would have to distract the person to protect my students. Make no mistake that I considered these students mine to protect at no cost. As time progressed we heard helicopters overhead and many sirens as police came off exit 11 and headed for Sandy Hook School. After 2 ½ hours of laying on the floor the lock-down was over and things started to unfold in the press I realized that I once taught the shooter.

I remember him well and thought he never belonged here but as an educator everybody is entitled to be here. Mental health facilities were closed and the schools became the support centers, the teachers their counselors. Because of HIPPA we could not be told what was wrong. We were only told how to accommodate them. What made it worse was that the system would not send them to a private school for the troubled because a decision like that meant they would have to pay for it out of their limited budget. At all costs the student stayed in the system.

What should change?

Should teachers carry guns? I would quit tomorrow. I've talked to many students about this and they also think this is insane. School resource officers? The students and I have a great respect for them as long as they relate to the students. I think of officer friendly when I was a kid. Bring him back. My fear is that budgets would eventually lead to a low paying person given the same job and not the training or respect. The police in this school from all across the state have been awesome. As one officer put it, "I have never been hugged so much."

Should we get rid of assault rifles? Yes, Yes, Yes. I'm not opposed to guns for hunting but there is no sport in these weapons only destruction of life. How many lives would have been saved at Sandy Hook if there weren't these high capacity clips? I would be ashamed to live in this state if we didn't learn by our tragic lessons. As I watch these pro-gun activists it scares me even more. Some of them remind me of the shooter.

What do I propose for mental health? The schools should not be penalized for referring students to other facilities for help. The money and decisions for such an action has to come from a child advocacy group not a politician or school system.

The future lives of many people are in your hands and I literally mean a person's life. You are being watched by the whole country and the world. Don't let all the money of the NRA sway your decision. . They won't give up but neither will I. I'm a teacher and I don't have millions of dollars only the love and respect of my students and that means the world to me.

By the way...to this day if I hear a helicopter it brings me back to that day and I suspect it always will. It scares me. If I can be of any further help please contact me.

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