

Written Testimony of

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Good afternoon. My name is H. Thomas (Tom) Brant and I am submitting the following testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Association of School Psychologists (CASP) for consideration by the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention & Children's Safety Mental Health Services Working Group Informational Forum and Public Hearing.

In the most recent publication of the Communique, the Newspaper of the National Association of School Psychologists, an article reported the following: "Approximately 20% of children in the United States experience significant mental, emotional, and behavioral symptoms that would qualify them for a psychiatric disorder (Burns et. al., 1995; Costello et. al., 2003). Unfortunately, only 15% -30% of these children receive any type of help or support (Ringle & Sturm, 2001; United States Public Health Services, 2000).

School safety should not just encompass building safety measures but have a focus on addressing the needs and services that improve the safety, well-being and learning of the children through a continuum. The challenges that we face are great and we should not let increased anxiety obscure the development of policies that support what schools can do effectively, which in turn support our primary mission of learning.

The National Association of School Psychologists has made recommendations for Comprehensive School Safety Policies, the Connecticut Association of School Psychologists concurs with them in that the most effective ways to address school safety is by: Increasing access to mental health services and supports in schools, developing safe and supportive schools, implementing safety initiatives that look at the psychological and physical safety of students, improving screening and threat assessment procedures to identify and meet the needs of individuals at risk for causing harm to themselves and others, establish trained school safety and crisis teams, a reduction in the stigma around mental illness and promote

mental health along with physical health, policies to limit exposure to media violence among children (2003, National Association of School Psychologists, NASP Recommendation for Comprehensive School Safety Policies).

The Connecticut Association of School Psychologists recommends that all school districts within the State of Connecticut adhere to the National Association of School Psychologists recommendation of one School Psychologist for every 500 students. This ratio allows for a best practice approach to school based psychological services. A best practice approach would allow School Psychologists to provide crucial early intervention services to students in Pre-K through twelfth grade. Research has continuously demonstrated that early intervention promotes positive pro social development.

Furthermore, CASP highly recommends that the all school districts adhere to the ratios that are recommended for School Counselors, which is 1:250 and for School Social Workers which is 1:400. Following the above mentioned ratios will ensure for a best practices approach to school based mental health services. Moreover, all school based mental health services should be provided by individuals with specific training in working with students in schools. These services can be provided by School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers. The provision of services by individuals without specific training in working with the school age population within a school can prove problematic and is not a recommended as a long term solution to providing mental health services. School safety includes school based mental health services for all students by those who know the developmental needs of all students.

Community based agencies and supports need to be adequately funded so they may provide support to school based mental health providers. Community agencies are integral in the coordination of services for those students who need support outside of the school day and during the months when school is not in session. If community based supports are not properly staffed and/or funded, a comprehensive model of wrap around mental health services cannot be successfully provided.

Although we are reacting to a terrible event now, this is the time to be proactive and provide training to school employees, first responders and community providers with the skills necessary to deal with trauma within the school settings. Support staff (School Psychologists, School Social Workers, and School Counselors) provide services to students on a daily basis. Training them in models such as PREPaRE School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training from the National Association of School Psychologists will create an infrastructure within districts and within the state to meet the needs of children, families and staff we work with.