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**Testimony for the School Security Sub Committee of the Bipartisan Task Force
on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety
School Social Workers
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Submitted By: Stephen Karp, MSW**

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter, representing over 3,200 members, I am here today to speak in favor of employing school social workers in every school as a means of enhancing school security through prevention and early detection of potential student problems. Physical security is one piece of the puzzle and enhancement of key personnel is another part and that is where school social workers come in. NASW recommends a ratio of 1 social worker to every 250 students and the School Social Work Association of America recommends a 1/400 ratio.

School security starts with building a safe community within the school by developing a culture of respect for each other. It requires creating and maintaining a team approach of professionals that can teach children the behaviors that are acceptable and the importance of valuing the similarities and differences that each child brings to school. By putting in place such an infrastructure it is more likely that the student who is exhibiting signs of distress, is a loner or appears to be an outcast will be identified and assisted prior to a serious incident occurring. School social workers by training are best prepared to take a lead in creating this environment as the social worker is a link between the student and all other school personnel, the family and the environment. This approach, known as Person in Environment, is one of the foundations of social work training. No other school personnel have this overarching responsibility to connect all of the systems that the student interacts with. School social workers serve as a catalyst to bring people together to create an environment conducive to learning.

Children today have more stress than ever before that place increasing numbers of children at risk. School social workers can help children learn ways of adapting to stressful situations before maladaptive coping skills are established. It has been shown that children with healthy adaptive coping skills to stress have higher attendance rates, decreased drop-out rates, higher test scores and higher self-esteem. All of these elements are part of assuring school security for the more integrated into the school a student becomes and the more academically successful the student is the less likely that student will become a safety risk to self or others.

School social workers help at-risk students through means of prevention, early identification, intervention, counseling and support. School social workers address issues of bullying, crisis intervention, drug and alcohol use, issues of self-esteem, child neglect and abuse. School social workers offer counseling, conflict resolution, group intervention and connect students with needed services both in the school and the larger community. Plus, when an incident happens, such as a shooting, those schools with social workers have staff onsite to offer counseling for students and staff.

Focusing on students is a key aspect of school social work practice however it is just one of numerous important roles of school social workers. Social workers are pro-actively involved in working with parents to enhance parent involvement, assuring families have information and access to community services, and collaborating with outside agencies such as the Department of Children and Families are all part of a school social workers typical day. Teachers and school administrators also benefit, in multiple ways, from having available school social workers as a resource, including helping to explain how family issues are affecting academic performance, coordinating services, and assisting in developing individual educational goals and the means to help the student attain those goals. All of this builds a positive school community where children can feel safe.

Schools do not function in a vacuum. When students cross that school door they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of poverty, trauma, fears of being bullied, and in this poor economy where so many families are struggling to get by the concerns that a poor economy places on a family press on the student's mind. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom. School social workers break through these barriers by providing students with the coping skills and support necessary to allow learning to take place.

Having safe and secure schools takes a team approach of school professionals in collaboration with the larger community. School social workers are an integral part of that team and when a school does not have a school social worker that school is functioning with an incomplete team. We urge this Sub-committee to recommend that each school have school social work personnel.