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Testimony of

Michael Casey

Connecticut Education Association

Before the Education Committee

HB 7110 An Act Concerning Enhanced Classroom Safety and School Climate

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Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee, my name is Michael Casey and I am a union representative for the Connecticut Education Association. I represent teachers in 10 school districts in the Southeastern part of the State.

Violent, assaultive, and disruptive behavior in our schools is a serious and pervasive problem that greatly interferes in the ability of our teachers to teach, and students to learn. We are seeing more troubling behaviors, and they are starting at a very young age. It is not uncommon for me to hear of classrooms being evacuated on a regular basis to protect students whilst one of their classmates throws chairs and other dangerous objects around the room, and/or attempts to punch, kick, spit on, or otherwise injure teachers and classmates. In some cases this happens multiple times per week in the same classroom. In addition to the obvious risk of injury, and actual injuries to teachers and students, this behavior decreases instructional time and negatively impacts the ability to provide a safe environment conducive to learning.

Unfortunately, these troubled students are often assigned to the least-experienced teachers who do not have tenure, and are therefore fearful of not having their teaching contracts renewed. These teachers are not likely to speak up for fear of losing their jobs – and for that reason you are not likely to hear from them directly in this committee.

I constantly hear from teachers that when they send a student to the office for disruptive behavior, the student returns a short time later with no consequences, and no or little follow up from the Administrator. I have repeatedly heard from Teachers that their Administrators have said that it's better for the Administrator to remain the student's friend than to impose a serious consequence on the student. This lack of accountability undermines the teacher's authority in the classroom, and results in further disruptive behavior.

In Norwich the problem was so prolific that when we negotiated our new contract last year, the Teachers attempted to add language that would require basic protocols to be put in place to help protect teachers and students from the type of dangerous behavior we've been discussing. The language simply required that the District provide every teacher at the beginning of the school year with a **written protocol** that would: 1.) identify which Administrator should be notified if a teacher needs administrator intervention to address student behavior; 2.) designate a location for teachers to send students who are seriously disrupting the classroom; 3.) provide a process to follow to immediately

address a situation that poses an **imminent danger** to students or staff; and 4.) provide a process whereby the teacher and Administrator would engage in an interactive discussion within two (2) school days to determine how the student's behavior should be addressed.

Our proposal was simply about having protocols in place to deal with an imminent and potentially dangerous situation, and it simply required that there be a conversation between the school Administrator and classroom teacher to discuss how the behavior might best be addressed. It did NOT require a particular consequence. But even this benign language, which was intended to facilitate open communication and a team approach to dealing with these issues was vehemently and perplexingly opposed by the Administration and never made into our contract.

I am very pleased to see some of the sensible protocols that we were seeking included in this bill.

We are losing good teachers because of this problem. They are leaving the profession, fearing for their personal safety, and to escape the extreme stress and lack of support in having to deal with these traumatic and dangerous situations. Last year I had a Kindergarten teacher in one of my districts who had to evacuate her classroom 2-3 times per week to protect her students from a classmate who threw chairs and other objects around the room and who hit, kicked and stabbed students and staff. That teacher has now left the profession. I have others with similarly horrific situations existing in their classrooms today. I literally spoke with one teacher this morning who advised me that a student who has had repeated behavioral issues all year long, physically struck two classmates this morning and pulled another's hair. That teacher, too, is considering leaving the profession. Our children deserve good teachers, but if we don't support them and provide them and their students a safe environment, make no mistake, they will leave.

My testimony today is poor substitute for the accounts of those teachers who I represent. I am aware of teachers who would have testified today but cannot because they need to be in the classroom while we discuss a bill concerning their and their students' classroom safety. I urge you to read all of the written testimonials that have been submitted. You may have difficulty believing some of those accounts, but they are true, and they are disturbing, and they need to be addressed because they are not being addressed.

I ask that you take action to help create an educational environment where ALL students feel safe and can focus on learning. And when I say ALL students I include those who need the services and supports to address whatever issues are causing them to engage in disruptive or injurious behaviors. I fear that if these kids do not get the interventions they need when they are young, they will end up in the criminal justice system, and that would not be fair. I urge you to support this bill.

And if there are no questions I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.