

Testimony of
Jennifer Reynolds
Danbury Teacher

Before the Education Committee

Re: HB 7110 AAC Enhanced Classroom Safety and School Climate

February 22, 2019

Good Morning Senators McCrory and Berthel, Representatives Sanchez and McCarty,

My name is Jennifer Reynolds, I am a 4th grade teacher, and I have worked for Danbury Public Schools for 19 years. I am here to testify on behalf of Bill 7110.

As teachers it is vital that we create environments where students feel safe enough to learn. Here is a small list of what I've experienced:

- A 9-year-old bringing a Bowie knife to school
- A 2nd grader taken out of school strapped to a stretcher so they do no harm
- A 7-year-old hurling metal desks and chairs with adults pressed up against the walls to stay out of harms way
- A 5-year-old kicking, scratching and biting their tutor's day after day
- Terrified first graders rushed from their room as protection from a fellow student
- An elderly teacher pushed aside by an angry student
- A school in lockdown repeatedly because of a student who has lost control and is roaming the hallways
- An 11-year-old holding a metal desk above her head menacingly in a room full of frightened classmates
- An entire grade level trapped because of a furious, violent student, outside of their doors
- A pregnant teacher being shoved aside by a student not getting their way

We all want these struggling, troubled students to get the help that they need, whatever that help may look like. We are grateful that there are many advocates and agencies out there for them.

But where are the agencies and advocates for the other 20 children in each class? Why must they be collateral damage?

I have had years where 75% of my day was taken up by the troubled child in the classroom. Every child that I teach deserves a full share of my time; every single one. How are these children expected to make necessary growth when their teacher is too busy running interference? In a climate where test scores determine everything, how can we possibly expect substantial progress from students who are afraid.

The measure of a good day is no longer about learning. The measure of a good day now is that no one was injured, assaulted or suspended.

I can tell you with certainty, that Danbury has one of the finest staffs in any state. But we need more help. We need more protection for the staff and the students.

One year I had a classroom with an aggressive and violent student. Staff would come into my room and tell me how amazingly quiet the rest of the kids were; how well behaved. I would tell them to come back on a day when the troubled student was absent, which they did. They were shocked. They saw fidgety kids, chatty kids, silly kids, loud kids, and spirited discussions throughout the lesson. They asked, "What did you do to them?"

My simple answer was, "Today they are not afraid. Today they can just be kids."

I'd like to finish my remarks today by reading a card that I received one Christmas from a 9-year-old girl. This card is why I sit before you today.

It says,

"Dear Ms. Reynolds,

Thank you for everything you have done so far. Thank you for always worrying about our safety."

I can't let this little girl down, can you?

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.

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