

Distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Malini Parikh; I live in Guilford, Connecticut. I am president of the Connecticut Against Gun Violence (CAGV) Youth Council.

I am testifying **in support of HB 7077**, An Act Concerning Crisis Response Drills.

Every day when I walk into school, a fear lingers in the back of my mind. Every time I see someone I don't recognize in the building, I feel a pang of anxiety. Every morning, before stepping out of my parent's car, I say "I love you" – because what if that's the last time I ever get to say it? This fear exists because school shootings continue to happen. But instead of easing our fears about active shooters, active assailant simulations on school campuses further perpetuate this fear. I refuse to let future generations endure this distorted sense of fear without the important changes that this legislation would mandate.

School is no longer just a place where students learn, but a place where students practice hiding in a corner with the lights off, staying still and silent, preparing for the possibility of an unthinkable tragedy. When I hear the alarm, there is always a split second of terror—is this time real?

There is no sufficient evidence to show that active shooter drills save lives. What we **do** know is that they make us even **more** afraid. A study from Georgia Tech found that active shooter drills are associated with a 42% increase in anxiety and stress and a 39% increase in depression among children from as young as five years old to high schoolers, their parents and teachers. Young children, in particular, struggle to distinguish between reality and drills, resulting in significant psychological harm.

It is important that we are aware and mindful that the pressure, surprise-element and intensity of these drills can especially affect children that have experienced **prior** trauma in their lives, thus compounding the impact upon already vulnerable youth. Without proper measures, these drills can do more harm than good.

I stand before you to ask that HB 7077 be passed to ensure that drills are trauma-informed, and prioritize both physical **and** psychological safety, and eliminate harmful active assailant simulations. These drills should help prepare students, not traumatize them further than the state of the world already does. HB 7077 mandates that schools provide age-appropriate education and training before these drills to reduce the potential for emotional distress. We need to stop blindsiding students with active assailant simulations, and instead, provide them (and their parents) ample notice to mentally prepare for such events. Safety measures should prepare us, not further traumatize us.

A single school shooting is one too many and it is much of the reason why, as a sixteen year old and President of the CAGV Youth Council, I dedicate my time outside of school to putting an end to gun violence in our state. We, as students who have participated in such drills, can attest first hand to its detrimental effect on our well-being and mental health. We, as students, are asking you to listen to us when we tell you that a more thoughtful approach to safety, that keeps student psychological health as a priority, is critical. Mass shootings represent less than 1% of overall school gun violence incidents. Thus, active shooter drills focus on an extremely unlikely scenario, and without the proper safeguards, creates an unnecessary level of fear that is disproportionate to actual risk, and results in additional trauma to students forced to participate. Drills should reflect this reality and help students feel secure rather than reinforcing a culture of

fear.

This legislation would provide warning of when the drills are going to occur, providing reassurance to parents and students that it is a preparatory event. It would also provide parents the opportunity to counsel children with a prior history of trauma before the date of the drill. In addition, age-appropriate education regarding the nature and reason for such a drill would go a long way to allow children to feel safe, and importantly, provide an opportunity for students to voice their fears and concerns.

We deserve to feel safe, but safety drills should not cause terror. HB 7077 ensures that preparedness does not come at the cost of our mental well-being. I urge you to pass this bill and take this necessary step towards a more thoughtful, evidence-based approach to crisis response in schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Malini Parikh

Guilford, CT

Connecticut Against Gun Violence Youth Council President