

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7077

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING CRISIS RESPONSE DRILLS.

Vote Date: 3/21/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/3/2025

File No.: 598

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to strengthen crisis response procedures in schools by prioritizing both physical safety and students' psychological well-being. It mandates the formation of school safety committees, comprising law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, educators, and parents, to collaboratively develop, implement, and annually review comprehensive safety plans. These measures ensure that drills are not only effective in preparing for emergencies but also conducted in ways that minimize trauma and support mental health.

Given the increasing safety concerns in schools, this bill is crucial for creating a balanced approach to emergency preparedness. By incorporating mental health experts and community stakeholders into the planning process, the bill promotes safer, more supportive learning environments and ensures that crisis drills do not inadvertently harm the very students they are meant to protect.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute adds additional elements to the prohibition on crisis drills with students that include active assailant simulation -- prohibits simulated violence with highly sensorial elements such as fake assailants, firearms, gunfire sounds, blood, or injuries; allows simulated violence for staff-only drills.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education](#) offered commented on the bill, stating they continue to collaborate with the Connecticut Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security to ensure the physical and emotional safety of students and staff, including the development of school security and safety plans. Commissioner Tucker stated that the Department defers to the written testimony of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection concerning the disclosure of sensitive information.

[Ronnell Higgins, Commissioner, DESPP](#) offered comments on the bill. Commissioner Higgins noted that section four, “may inadvertently lead to the release of sensitive information that would otherwise be protected due to security reasons.” The Commissioner also recommended they work in consult with the committee to clarify data collection methods, and argued they may need further agency funding to enact additional school safety measures. They concluded that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection will continue to support efforts to improve emergency preparedness at Connecticut schools.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Amery Bernhardt, Director, CT Center for School Safety](#) testified in support of the bill, stating the importance of both physical and psychological safety for students during school crisis drills. They state recommendations to enhance safety while ensuring emotional well-being, aligning with recent guidance from the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security. They state that the recommendations cover a range of areas, including creating comprehensive emergency operations plans, training staff, fostering a supportive school climate, avoiding simulated violence, providing advanced notice of drills, ensuring inclusivity for all students, and offering support and debriefing after drills.

[Cindy Carlson, Connecticut Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill, stating that these drills must prioritize student mental health and be trauma-informed, given that students are already deeply affected by the trauma of school shootings, both directly and through media exposure. Carlson argued that current drills may inadvertently cause psychological harm, and research shows that they do not effectively prevent shootings. Carlson also raised concerns that such drills could provide valuable information to potential perpetrators. Carlson urged support for the bill as it would ultimately prevent further psychological distress for students and minimize the risk of inadvertently training future shooters.

[Carly Corrigan, CT Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill, and as a mother of two children is concerned about their physical safety and the potential mental health impact of participating in these drills. Corrigan acknowledged that while mass school shootings are rare, the trauma caused by active shooter drills is significant, with studies link these drills to increased depression, stress, and anxiety in students and staff. Corrigan urged lawmakers to pass the bill to ensure that drills are developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and prioritize students' well-being.

[Katie Digianantonio, Chair, DWA Indivisible](#) testified in support of the bill, expressing concerns over the trauma caused by active shooter drills.

[Michelle Fitzgerald, Parent](#) testified in support of the bill, stating concerns over the lack of emergency plans for children with special needs during school crisis drills. When a threat that was made in March of 2024 at their son's school, they realized their youngest child would not be safe in an emergency due to his sensory issues and communication challenges from his ASD. Similarly, during a fire drill their son became agitated due to a lack of proper support and emphasized that every child's safety should be prioritized in emergency preparedness.

[Regina Griffin](#) testified in support of the bill, stating the importance of crisis response drills while emphasizing the need to avoid causing unnecessary fear or harm to children. Griffin praised the School Crisis Response Drills Working Group for finding a balanced approach that prioritizes safety without additional psychological harm.

[Emily Kaliney, Supporter, CT Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill, emphasizing the importance of conducting crisis response drills that prioritize both physical and psychological safety. Kaliney advocated for trauma-informed drills that consider prior traumatic experiences, are age-appropriate, and do not include active assailant simulations. Kaliney also stressed the need for schools to provide advance notice of drills and ensure participants understand they are part of a drill to avoid confusion during actual emergencies.

[Linda McConville](#) testified in support of the bill, stating it is irresponsible that adults, who carry the responsibility of creating healthy environments for our children, to place the trauma of gun violence on students. McConville stated that drills must have trauma informed practices, school safety plans must be in place and up to date, and clear communication with parents is essential.

[Thomas Nuccio, Childrens Policy Analyst, CWCSEO](#) testified in support of the bill, and emphasized the importance of balancing effective crisis drills, such as lockdowns, with the need to consider the potential stress and trauma they can cause, particularly for students with disabilities. Nuccio recommended involving disability specialists to address the physical and emotional needs of students. Nuccio acknowledged the rarity of violent events in schools but believed that careful planning is essential to create drills that protect students while reducing unnecessary trauma.

[Malini Parikh, President, Connecticut Against Gun Violence Youth Council](#) testified in support of the bill, and recounted living with the constant fear of school shootings. Parikh provided studies that show such drills increase anxiety, stress, and depression in students, especially those with past trauma. Parikh argued that these drills should be trauma-informed, prioritizing both physical and psychological safety; additionally, schools should eliminate active assailant simulations and ensure that drills are age-appropriate, with adequate preparation and prior notice to reduce emotional distress. Parikh emphasized that safety drills should not traumatize students but instead help them feel secure.

[Oscar Pitkin, Connecticut Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill and expressed concern for the mental health impact of extreme active shooter drills. Pitkin recounted growing up with lockdown drills since the Sandy Hook shooting, and highlighted those extreme drills, which simulate real shootings, have no evidence of effectiveness, and can harm students' mental health, increasing anxiety, stress, and depression. Additionally, Pitkin emphasized the vulnerability of children with disabilities and the need for accommodations

during such drills. Pitkin advocated for trauma-informed, voluntary drills that clearly distinguish between practice and reality, involve parental feedback, and prioritize psychological safety.

[Alexandra Ruiz, Dwight Hall Advocacy Committee](#) testified in support of the bill. Ruiz recalled working with New Haven locals, particularly those affected by gun violence, and emphasized the need to change how drills are conducted. Ruiz noted that the bill reflects the findings of the School Crisis Response Drills Working Group, which studied the impact of crisis drills on children's mental health; additionally, a study from Georgia Tech showed that active shooter drills increase anxiety, depression, and stress among students, teachers, and parents. The working group's findings advocated for trauma-informed, age-appropriate drills that avoid simulations of real incidents, involve mental health professionals, and provide advance notice to parents.

[Becky Schoenfeld](#) testified in support of the bill, citing evidence that active shooter drills, especially those simulating real shootings, can traumatize students, and increase anxiety, depression, and stress. Schoenfeld cited a study from Georgia Tech that found there a significant negative effect of active shooter drills on students and teachers; additionally, that the National Association of School Psychologists and other organizations recommend avoiding highly sensory simulations due to their potential for harm.

[Cali Taylor, Co-Chair, Junior Newtown Alliance](#) testified in support of the bill and emphasized the need to reevaluate school safety drills. Taylor shared their personal experience and the trauma caused by these drills, particularly after their mother survived the Sandy Hook school shooting. Taylor argued the current drills often cause fear and make it difficult for students to focus on safety protocols, and in some cases, could make schools more vulnerable. Taylor concluded by supporting the bill's proposal for a more effective, trauma-sensitive approach, ensuring drills are handled by first responders and teachers to prioritize student well-being.

[Skylar Urbina, Junior Newtown Action Alliance](#) testified in support of the bill. Urbina shared their traumatic experiences with active shooter drills, beginning at age 3 and intensified after the loss of a childhood friend in the Sandy Hook shooting. Rather than preparing students, these drills increase fear and anxiety, making it difficult to focus on their education with the constant reminder of a potential tragedy creates lasting emotional distress.

[Stephen Bodkin, Supporter, CT Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill, stating the lasting impact of the Sandy Hook tragedy and emphasized the responsibility to protect children while ensuring their well-being. Bodkin cited studies showing that high-intensity drills can increase fear and anxiety among students and highlights the American Academy of Pediatrics' concerns about the psychological risks of such drills. Bodkin concluded by advocating for a compassionate and effective approach to school safety that prioritizes students' mental health.

[Louis Burch, Legislative Coordinator, Connecticut Education Association](#) testified in support of the bill because it directs the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to collaborate with the Connecticut Center for School Safety and Crisis Prevention to establish standardized definitions, terminology, and guidelines for crisis drills. Burch acknowledged that while periodic drills are essential for crisis preparedness, overuse can lead to increased trauma and anxiety, particularly among students with PTSD or developmental disabilities.

Burch supported the bill's aim to create a trauma-informed approach to drills, ensuring that they are effective without negatively affecting the mental health of students and staff and it emphasizes the need for coordinated planning, considering the diverse needs of the school community.

[Abbey Clements, Teacher, Teachers Unify](#) and survivor of the Sandy Hook tragedy testified in support of the bill and for greater awareness of the mental health impacts of active shooter drills. Clements highlighted that few evidence suggests that current drills save lives, and noted that they can increase stress, anxiety, and depression among students.

[Paula Lopez, University Trainer, Connecticut Association of School Psychologists](#) testified in support of the bill which provides a trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate approach to these drills. Lopez stated the importance of both physical and psychological safety, noting that poorly structured drills can harm students, especially those with prior trauma or emotional challenges. Lopez continued that this bill ensures consistency across districts, involves mental health professionals in planning, prohibits distressing simulations, prioritizes clear communication with all stakeholders, and aligns with national standards for best practices in school safety.

[Stacey Mayer, Director of Advocacy, Policy & Outreach, CT Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill, stating concerns about the emotional harm caused by hyper-realistic active shooter drills. These drills, though intended to prepare for emergencies, have been linked to increased anxiety, depression, and confusion among students, especially young children, and stresses that while school shootings are rare, these drills create disproportionate fear.

[Po Murray, Chairwoman, Newtown Action Alliance](#) testified in support of the bill because crisis drills should not traumatize students, many of whom have grown up in the shadow of school shootings; additionally, and drills can cause fear and distress, with some children crying after drills causing teachers to spend more time reassuring students than teaching. Murray supported the bill because it implements standardized, research-backed drill protocols, ensures trauma-informed practices, eliminates active assailant simulations for students, and requires communication with families before drills. The bill also mandates evaluations to improve school safety and emphasizes the importance of school climate in ensuring student well-being. Murray stressed that this is a personal issue for their community and urges lawmakers to support the bill to prepare students without causing harm.

[Jonathan Perloe, Supporter, CT Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill, stating students often experience anxiety, with some crying after the drills out of confusion. Perloe acknowledged that the bill has broad support from educators and organizations like the National Association of School Psychologists, who warn that poorly executed drills can traumatize students and staff. Perloe emphasized the need to balance preparedness with the potential harm of fear and anxiety. She also states that active shooter simulations have been linked to increased depression and anxiety among students.

[Annea Rosenberg, Supporter, CT Against Gun Violence](#) testified in support of the bill, recalling their role in post-9/11 security measures and time as a library media specialist during the Sandy Hook tragedy. Rosenberg stated the importance of safety drills but emphasized the emotional toll they take on students, particularly when the purpose of the drills isn't properly explained; the bill addresses these concerns by ensuring that students,

including non-English speakers, physically challenged students, and special education students, understand the purpose of the drills.

[Meg Scata, Board Member, Portland Board of Education](#) testified in support of the bill and the importance of appropriately training school staff and preparing students, especially those who have experienced trauma. Scata agreed with notifying parents and students one week in advance, but hoped this notice won't include specific dates and times to maintain the drill's effectiveness. Scata shared concerns about the potential unfunded mandate of sending notices in multiple languages. Scata recommended that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and the Center provide clear definitions, guidance, response standards, and evaluation templates soon to assist districts in planning for the next year.

[Joanna Taczanowsky, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense](#) testified in support of the bill, because of the negative impacts of frequent active shooter drills, especially on students with disabilities or trauma. Taczanowsky emphasized the rarity of school gun violence and advocated for secure firearm storage to prevent access. Taczanowsky supported the bill for its age-appropriate, trauma-informed approach to drills, involvement of mental health professionals, and prohibition of simulated incidents, and believed the bill ensures emergency preparedness without causing unnecessary stress or harm to students.

[Catherine Weaver](#) testified in support of the bill. Weaver has participated in the gun violence prevention movement since 2018, and advocates for common-sense gun laws. Weaver acknowledged that crisis response drills are now common, but they can be traumatizing for some students. Weaver's son was involved in a real lockdown at school, but thankfully, he was safe. While drills are necessary to prepare students and reduce panic, Weaver emphasized the need for standardization and best practices to ensure drills are effective and cause minimal harm.

[Irene Skrybailo](#) testified in support of the bill and stated the harmful impact of active shooter and trauma-responsive drills on children. Skrybailo argued that such drills can traumatize or desensitize them to the experience, like adults who ignore fire drills. Skrybailo appreciated that the bill prioritized safeguarding the mental and physical health of students and staff.

[Nishka Desai](#) testified in support of the bill. Desai cited findings from the American Academy of Pediatrics that found these drills are linked to increased anxiety and depression among students. Desai urged policymakers to prioritize student well-being and ensure that any drills conducted are trauma-informed and age-appropriate, balancing preparedness with the mental health of students.

[Jeffry Spahr, State Advisory Council for Special Education](#) testified in support of the bill and recommended an amendment to include a special education department representative on local School Security and Safety Committees. Spahr referenced recommendations from the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and the Department of Education that suggested this addition.

[Jan DeAngelo](#) testified in support of the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Barbara Ripple, Grandmother](#) testified opposing the bill due to personal reasons largely unrelated to the content of the bill.

[Susan Lim](#) testified opposing the bill due to personal reasons largely unrelated to the content of the bill.

[Kim Dees](#) testified opposing the bill due to personal reasons largely unrelated to the content of the bill.

[Harold Dubuc, Retired](#) testified opposing the bill due to personal reasons largely unrelated to the content of the bill.

[James Lina, Taxpayer](#) testified opposing the bill due to personal reasons

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENTS:

[Dr. Maureen L. Brummett, Superintendent of Schools, Newington Public Schools](#) testified concerning the bill. While they acknowledged the importance of preparing students, Dr. Brummett raised concerns about the added workload and costs of translating the notices. Additionally, there may be a risk of parents misinterpreting the notices and rushing to the school, potentially disrupting the drill. Dr. Brummett questioned the necessity of notifying parents about routine drills, emphasizing that in actual emergencies, parents are notified as soon as possible.

[Christopher Olsen, Director of Safety and Security](#) offered general comments on the bill and suggested reviewing who is responsible for creating and managing safety plans, drills, and crisis responses for schools. Olsen stated that often school events are organized by individuals without emergency management experience, including athletic and extracurricular events, as well as crisis drills. Olsen remarked on the strain on school officials who are tasked with these responsibilities, especially given the increasing behavioral issues at events and legal requirements surrounding crisis plans. Additionally, building administrators do not receive specific training in safety staff management or security protocols, beyond basic Incident Command modules. Olsen concluded that often, it is not the drill itself that causes anxiety, but the reason for the drill.

[Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents](#) testified on the bill, particularly with reservations on sending out notices to parents in their native language every time a crisis drill is to take place because it is additional work on the part of the district and could entail additional expense in translating to the native language. They stated that funding should be provided for this unfunded mandate.

Reported by: Matthew Domejczyk, Assistant Clerk **Date:** 4/7/25