

# The Connecticut General Assembly



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## **STAMFORD LAWMAKERS HAIL HOUSE PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION FOR MAKING SCHOOLS SAFER**

### *Incidents in Stamford schools prompt bill requiring Sexual misconduct disclosure, zero tolerance of threats*

Lawmakers representing Stamford praised the House of Representatives for passing legislation the delegation sought for making schools safer. The legislators drafted and championed the legislation after several incidents in Stamford highlighted the need for tougher laws.

The legislation requires boards of education to share with other boards findings of abuse or sexual misconduct by teachers. The legislation also increases the penalties for making a threat to a preschool, K-12 school or an institution of higher education.

“As legislators we have to make sure that our children are safe, and this legislation addresses two major issues that have plagued our schools,” said Rep. William Tong (D-Stamford, Darien), House chairman of the Judiciary Committee, which introduced the bill. “The Stamford delegation deserves a lot of credit for passage of this bill.”

“Our top priority is to ensure that children are safe when they go to school every day,” Rep. Caroline Simmons (D-Stamford) said. “This is about shielding students from sexual predators and ensuring that such incidents are disclosed so that students in other districts are safe too.”

“By requiring school boards to share information about sexual misconduct by teachers, we can ensure that our schools no longer unknowingly hire a sex offender and that the incidents that have occurred in our district will never happen again,” Rep. Terry Adams (D-Stamford) said. “By increasing the penalty for those who make threats to the schools, people will be deterred from doing so. Not only does this legislation emphasize the

seriousness of the crime, but it will also make students and educators feel safer at school.”

“Ensuring the safety of children in our schools should always be a top priority. We cannot allow individuals who have been found guilty of sexual misconduct to jump from one school to another or tolerate threats of violence made against educational institutions,” Rep. Patricia Billie Miller (D-Stamford) said. “I thank Representative Tong for his leadership on this bill, and I believe these protections will go a long way towards preventing acts of violence in our schools.”

“This is an important piece of legislation that promotes a safe school environment and will go a long way towards protecting our state’s students,” said Rep. Daniel Fox, vice chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

“This is a common sense initiative that helps assure that when parents send their students to school, they can be assured that their offspring will be in a safe and secure environment. Transparency and accountability are always laudable goals,” Rep. Livvy R. Floren (R-Stamford, Greenwich) said.

One of the goals of the legislation is to ensure that local and regional boards of education have information concerning whether an applicant has been found to have committed abuse or sexual misconduct and that local and regional boards of education share findings with other boards of education who may otherwise unknowingly hire a sex offender.

“Unfortunately, there has been a practice among school districts, whether intentional or not, where one teacher who is suspected of wrongdoing or is (doing wrong) in one district has then moved on to another school district, and sometimes the receiving school district doesn’t have the information that it needs before hiring that teacher. We want to stop that practice,” Tong said.

If the legislation is signed into law, Connecticut would join Pennsylvania, Missouri and Oregon as the only states to require boards of education to share information on sexual abusers.

The bill also addresses the need for zero-tolerance of threats of violence made in schools by increasing the criminal penalties for when a threat involves a preschool, K-12 school or an institution of higher education. Legislation was drafted following a wave of bomb threats this year and last in Stamford and schools across the state.

“There should be zero tolerance for this kind of behavior,” Tong said. “This legislation should send a crystal clear message – if you threaten our schools and our kids and our teachers, we are going to come down hard on you.”