



Connecticut Education Association

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Testimony of

Connecticut Education Association

Before the Committee on Children

Re:

**HB 5474 An Act Concerning the Use of Social Media Platforms
by Individuals Sixteen Years of Age and Under**

SB 1216 An Act Concerning School Emergency Response Systems

SB 1217 AA Providing School Meals to All Students

February 6, 2025

Representative Linehan, Senator Maher and members of this esteemed committee, my name is Kate Dias, and I am the President of Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

I submit testimony today in support of three important bills.

5474 AAC THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS BY INDIVIDUALS SIXTEEN YEARS OF AGE AND UNDER

CEA strongly supports HB 5474, "An Act Concerning the Use of Social Media Platforms by Individuals Sixteen Years of Age and Under."

Educators witness the negative impact social media is having on students every day. While these platforms can provide opportunities for connection and learning, they also pose significant, and potentially grave, risks. Algorithmic content delivery is designed to purposefully addict users without regard for young people's wellbeing and mental health. As the U.S. Surgeon General warned in 2023, these algorithms often push harmful content, including material related to eating

disorders, self-harm, and misinformation.¹ By limiting algorithmic targeting, this bill takes an essential step toward protecting students from the addictive and damaging effects of unchecked social media exposure.

Anxiety disorders among adolescents have skyrocketed in the past decade, and while there are many factors, social media plays a significant role. Many students report feeling addicted to their feeds, constantly comparing themselves to unrealistic portrayals of beauty and success. This unrelenting exposure over time fuels low self-esteem, sleep deprivation, heightened stress, and makes it harder for students to focus in school and engage in healthy, in-person relationships.² It also takes time away from play, which is the “work of childhood” to develop the brain.³

Additionally, requiring parental approval for social media use among individuals aged 16 and under reinforces the critical role parents and guardians play in ensuring their children’s safety and wellbeing. Parents should be able to determine when and how their children engage with these platforms, particularly given the well-documented concerns about privacy, mental health, and online exploitation.

Our educators work hard to support their students’ academic and emotional development. They are committed to fostering classroom and school environments that help students feel safe, supported, and able to thrive. They can’t, however, do this alone. Social media, driven by harmful and manipulative algorithms, makes their difficult work exponentially harder. Students are constantly distracted by social media content, and as a result, many struggle with engagement, focus, and emotional regulation. Learning is significantly and repeatedly interrupted and social skill development delayed. It is up to us to do what is necessary to protect the academic, physical, and mental health development of Connecticut’s children. We urge this committee to pass HB 5474.

SB 1216 AAC SCHOOL EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEMS

CEA supports SB 1216 and the continuous enhancement of school security systems.

At the start of this school year, a school district in Georgia experienced a school shooting. The loss of life was devastating. If not for cutting edge technology, the impact could have been significantly worse. Educators were recently equipped with communications technology that, in the event of an emergency, connected them directly to first responders. This technology ultimately saved the lives when children, educators, and others in the school community when shots rang out.

¹ U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health (2023), accessible from: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2023), accessible from: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

³ Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024)

Connecticut's response to horrific events of school violence has been done in a way that promotes collaboration between parents and educators in school communities and first responders. Our collective effort has balanced the "hardening" of schools with the importance of maintaining welcoming and friendly school environments for students.

SB 1216 will help ensure that this effort continues, and that the systems in place are effective. They would also help ensure that our systems keep pace with technologies that can make our schools even safer. We urge committee members to support this legislation.

SB 1217 AA PROVIDING SCHOOL MEALS TO ALL STUDENTS

CEA testifies in support of SB 1217, which would provide universal free breakfast in schools participating in the school breakfast program.

When children begin the school day well-fed and well-rested, they are better equipped to learn and develop socially and emotionally. We firmly believe that no student should be denied a school meal, singled out, or stigmatized for receiving free or reduced lunch or being unable to pay. Ensuring all children have access to nutritious meals—supported by state and federal funding—promotes their well-being and sets them up for success in the classroom and beyond.

We urge committee members' support.

Thank you for your time.