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December 9, 2021

Charlene M. Russell-Tucker
Commissioner
Connecticut State Department of Education
Via electronic mail

Dear Commissioner Russell-Tucker:

I hope that this letter finds you well. Thank you for your ongoing service to the children and educators of Connecticut. As we continue to make our way through the pandemic, I am optimistic that our public-school children will have a complete return to normalcy in the year to come. I trust that you consider their health and safety to be a top priority along with a thorough education.

I am writing to you today regarding another matter related to student health and safety. Over the past weeks, we have seen several concerning reports of escalating school violence across the state either on school grounds or within a school zone. Recently, a ninth-grade Hamden High School Student was [charged with stabbing](#) a fellow ninth-grade student during a fight near the school. This week, multiple public schools statewide either dismissed students early or went into lockdown because of a threat from a member of the student body.

Aside from the imminent threat to the health and safety of students in our schools, these incidents disrupt the learning process and prohibit students from receiving a proper education. I am pleased to learn that state agencies are working with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and I encourage you to allow them to utilize all the tools at their disposal to curb this marked uptick of violence in our schools. I also strongly encourage you to continue to utilize School Resource Officers to protect the wellbeing of our students. These officers are on the front lines, know the students, and can respond in a moment's notice as was the case at Hamden High School last week.

We have seen an uptick in youth violence and crime across the state over the past year. Now, this violence is seeping into our schools, places where students should feel safe to learn and grow. Therefore, the presence of law enforcement professionals in our public schools is more important today as it has ever been. Please know that I am available to assist the department wherever possible as we look to restore a safe learning environment for Connecticut's kids.

Sincerely,

Senator Eric Berthel
Ranking Member, Education Committee