

TESTIMONY OF

Senator Gale D. Candaras

RELATIVE TO

S. 305: “An Act Relative to School Safety”

**BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC SAFETY AND HOMELAND SECURITY**

May 15, 2007

I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 305, “An Act Relative to School Safety”. This hearing is the culmination of two years of hard work by the students of the Minnechaug Regional High School’s Model Congress and I am honored to join them here today. With the nation still reeling from the tragedy last month at Virginia Tech, the time has come to take a serious look at how prepared our schools are in the event of a non-fire emergency.

The students of Minnechaug’s Model Congress became interested in school safety drills when the Hampden Wilbraham Regional School District was awarded grant money from the United States Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. As the students witnessed safety upgrades to the school buildings in the district, the administration challenged this special group of young people to play an active role in the dialogue on how to improve school safety. Both the students and the administration were concerned with the rash of school shootings that had occurred over the years in the wake of the tragedy at Columbine High school.

As the administration took proactive steps to work in concert with local police and fire departments to develop a strategic plan to address emergencies including but not limited to: intruders in the building, terrorist attacks, and chemical spills in or around the school building. The students became interested in what other school districts around the state were doing,

and it was this curiosity that led the Model Congress to discover that there were no statewide standards or regulations mandating that school districts have a non-fire emergency response plan or drills for teachers and students to participate in. It was at this point they contacted my office to express their concern at the lack of regulations on the state level and their willingness to address the issue of school safety head on.

This legislation would expand upon current concepts such as “shelter in place,” where in the event of an intruder in a primary or secondary school, doors would be locked, lights would be turned out, windows would be shaded and students would hide quietly. Statewide standards for emergency lock down drills will be developed by the Massachusetts State Police. Each school in every district will be required to hold two “Code Grey” drills per school year to be evaluated by state and local police. Failure to satisfy the standard set by the Massachusetts State Police on three subsequent occasions would result in the school district being reported to the Department of Education for oversight.

The lock down procedure for each school would be created by either the district’s school committee or the principal and staff of each individual school within the district in conjunction with local public safety agencies to satisfy the requirements outlined by the State Police.

While I realize that there may be some kinks to work out of this proposal, I believe that the underlying intent of this bill is important and worth serious consideration by the legislature. It is my hope that much like the Hampden Wilbraham Regional School system has become a model in my district for student safety in Massachusetts, that Massachusetts will in turn become a model state for the rest of the nation. I congratulate the students of Minnechaug for bringing this important issue to the forefront of the public dialogue and now turn this testimony over to the experts.