

**Testimony of Thomas Kuroski**  
**President, Newtown Federation of Teachers**

**Before the Subcommittee on School Security**  
**Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety**

**January 25, 2013**

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Healthcare  
Higher Education  
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Teachers

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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to give voice to the concerns of the educators and school staff of our community.

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Melodie Peters  
PRESIDENT

The unspeakable violence that was visited on our community just more than one month ago has shaken us all to the core and heightened our sense of vulnerability. It also has compelled us to move with all expediency to focus our collective attention and energy on doing all we can to ensure that our schools are places where teachers can safely educate and nurture our students. The time is now for us to make sure our children are safe and our teachers are supported.

Stephen McKeever  
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Leo Canty  
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

Ed Leavy  
SECRETARY-TREASURER

As the elected president of the Newtown Federation of Teachers, my immediate concern in the hours and days following the massacre of 20 students and six adults at Sandy Hook School was for the children and the staff who were in that building—those who heard the sound of bullets and witnessed the carnage. My second concern was for those in schools throughout our district who felt the impact, as buildings were placed on lockdown during and immediately after the shootings.

In addition to the loss of the precious lives of the students, colleagues and friends who perished that day, we also lost our sense of security. All of a sudden, teachers didn't feel we were teaching in a safe environment. All of a sudden, we experienced feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. Many of us no longer felt capable of taking charge of students. For some of us, when we returned to our schools and classrooms, we felt insecure about doing our most sacred duty: teaching and nurturing our students while keeping them safe.

It is unthinkable that any community should endure such a tragedy. Our road to healing and a restored sense of normalcy will be long and littered with uncertainties. One thing, however, is certain: all of us—teachers, parents, school administrators, elected officials and our students—must have a seat at the table in discussions around school safety and what it will take to restore a sense of security for the children and adults in our schools.

As we continue to heal and to talk about the best ways to move our school district forward, it is imperative that we continue to keep lines of communications—between school administrators, teachers and parents—open and honest. I am encouraged by the spirit of cooperation evidenced over the past few weeks following a meeting between our union, schools superintendent Dr. Janet Robinson and school board chair Debbie Leidlein. Following the recommendations of the Newtown Federation of Teachers, the school board has given discretion to individual building leaders to reallocate time for Professional Learning Communities –time that was set aside to address curriculum development—to Professional *Healing* Communities, that center around how best to serve the immediate and ongoing needs of teachers and staff as we, too, struggle to grapple with the aftermath of the Sandy Hook shootings.

It is my sincere hope that, as we move forward, we all continue to come together as a collective entity, as a community. If educators have a voice, we feel safer and more confident in our ability to teach, nurture and protect our students.