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CONTACT: Robert Lowry • 518/449-1063 or 518/435-5996 (cell)
E-mail: boblowry@nyscoss.org

Statement on Advancing the Safety of Our Students

ALBANY - We mourn the loss of the school children of Newtown, Connecticut, and we honor the courageous educators who gave their lives protecting their students. In the wake of this terrible event, because of our profound responsibility for the security of millions of students each day, we must ask, “What more can we do?”

Every public school superintendent in New York State begins every working day with the thought, “Have we done everything we can to keep the children entrusted to our care safe today?” With that focus over the past several years, public schools have become more and more secure environments, ones in which evidence shows children are safer than in any other setting.

As the leaders of school districts, we are committed to the ongoing evaluation of the practices, the technology, the planning, the collaborations and the drills that strengthen the safety and security of our schools.

But there is more that must be done.

And so we call for several actions which are needed to strengthen school safety and security, but which are beyond our ability to control:

- Our elected leaders – and all of us as voters – must reassess the choices we have made which have drastically reduced the resources available for mental health services and have kept the few remaining services too isolated from our schools. There is far too little capacity to deal with the mental health needs of our children and young people. Few are potentially violent, but some are. We must serve them all.
- We are not experts in criminal justice, but we must urge a newly vigorous state and national conversation about what weapons should be available and to whom – which weapons are appropriate for hunting, other recreational uses, or reasonable self-defense, and which types – like the high capacity assault rifle used in last week’s massacre – that simply have no place in the hands of ordinary citizens.
- We also urge a robust and persistent national conversation about the consequences of an entertainment culture that relentlessly glorifies violence in movies, television, music and video games.

If the broader society can join with those of us who care for and educate its children in pursuing such an agenda, we believe that together we can move closer to making tragedies like Newtown far less likely than they are today.

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