LEGISLATORS TO CONDUCT HEARINGS ON TROUBLING VIDEOS OF TEACHERS UNION OFFICIALS

State legislators announced on a press release on Monday, May 7th that they will hold joint committee hearings in the wake of online videos that show teachers union officials suggesting that teachers should report assaults against students, including an alleged sexual assault.

Several videos have widely circulated online that appear to show teachers union officials condoning inappropriate teacher conduct. In one video, a union official not only suggests teachers should not report an incident where a teacher has hurt a student, but also refers to some students as "dirt bags" and claims a teacher having sex with an underage student will not face jail time.

"These union officials appear to be advocating for teachers to not report assaults against students," said Senator Sweeney (D-Gloucester/Salem/Cumberland). "In one video, a union official says, 'I need to know the truth so I can be the truth.' That's not how it works. We need to know the truth so we can hold everyone accountable for what they say and what they do. We don't know whether this is occurring in our public schools, but the allegations are serious. Clearly, there is a need for thorough fact finding on the part of the Senate. No adult in a school setting - regardless of who they are - can look the other way when it comes to violence against a student. Whether it's student on student or student on teacher - there is zero tolerance for this kind of egregious conduct. No one charged with educating our students should be supporting them. The stakes are too high to ignore - we're talking about our children."

"We must find out whatever type of alleged deplorable behavior is occurring," said Senator Ruiz (D-Essex). "We have to ensure that our students are safe in our schools and that all protocols in reporting cases of suspected abuse or mistreatment are done properly. Even if these are isolated incidents, there should be zero tolerance for any abusive behavior. As a parent, as an advocate and as a legislator, I am angry at the language used to describe my children. Every child, regardless of income, ethnicity and geography, deserves to be treated with dignity."

"We cannot ignore the concerns of parents and education advocates about what appears to be condoned in these videos," said Senator Fred Madden (D-Camden/Gloucester). "We need to hold joint hearings of the Senate Labor and Education Committees. These videos are disturbing. What I've seen is totally unacceptable. We have to make sure that the teacher disciplinary system in place serves the best interests of our school children." Senator Ruiz and Senator Madden said they will announce the hearing date as soon as it is scheduled.

STUDENTS VISIT SENIOR CENTER FOR A SPECIAL MOTHER'S DAY ACTIVITY

Students from The Archway Schools' Horticulture Program visited the residents of The Fountains at Cedar Parke for a special Mother's Day Flower Arranging Demonstration. Under the direction of Horticulture Instructors Kristine Henle-Blank and Tamah Gunson, the students showed residents how to create beautiful Mother's Day Teacup Arrangements with colorful flowers and greenery. There was plenty of light-hearted conversation and socializing, as both students and residents shared stories, smiles and new found friendships. This second flower arranging demonstration was coordinated by both Horticulture Instructors, Careers Teacher Brooke Chumura, along with Susan Mantz, Activities Director of The Fountains at Cedar Parke.

"For our students, this was such a fun and rewarding experience. It helps the students build social and communication skills, form relationships and build their confidence. The work we do in the horticulture program is very therapeutic for many of them, it's like being in the classroom all day and the students are very special to them to share that bond with the residents," said Kristine Henle-Blank, Horticulture Instructor at Archway Programs.

"For many of them, it's like being in the classroom again," Mantz said.

Pat Weaver, a resident who was visiting with the students after the flower arranging demonstration said it gives her something to look forward to. She thanked the students for bringing a bit of sunshine into the lives of the older generation. When asked if she liked making the floral arrangement with the students she responded, "Oh yes, my cup runneth over."