



TO: Honorable Members of the Michigan House of Representatives

FROM: Jennifer Smith, Director of Government Relations, MASB
Peter Spadafore, Associate Executive Director for Government Relations, MASA
Blaine Koops, Executive Director and CEO, Michigan Sheriffs' Association
Chief Robert Stevenson (Ret.), Executive Director, Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police
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DATE: May 8, 2018

RE: House Bills 5828-5830 and 5851 and the School Safety Proposal

This topic of school safety is not new to the school, law enforcement or mental health professional communities. As you know, MASB and MASA have joined with law enforcement groups and school mental health professionals to create a plan to address this issue in the short- and long-terms. The legislation before you represents a very important first step in the dialogue, however, we have some concerns with the bills as passed by the Appropriations Committee last week.

We appreciate many of the changes made, especially in House Bill 5828, which removed the requirement that school buildings be graded in regard to safety and that grade made publicly known. However, we do still have a few remaining suggestions and questions regarding the policy, especially with the lengthy timeline established for some schools to receive assistance. We shared these suggestions with the bill sponsor following committee:

- We suggest including the employment of school mental health professionals under the measures and metrics for school safety in 5(12). These professionals can play a vital part in safety by being able to assist students before they turn to violence.
- We request removing the school building proximity to law enforcement agencies in 5(12). Schools do not determine their location by proximity to law enforcement but by need within a community. Further, they don't control location decisions on behalf of law enforcement.
- On Page 6, line 9, subsection 13 where it makes the safety grade confidential, we'd like it to spell out that the safety rating and additional safety measure suggestions would be shared with the local district and that information should not be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. While this is most assuredly the intent, clarity in the law will prevent unintended consequences.
- On a technical note, on page 8, line 2, it references the wrong subsection, it should reference section 5(12) not (13).
- There is confusion around when the grants will be available to districts, whether it is after inspection or at the end of all inspections, three years from now. If a district is deemed inadequate, a second inspection is done in two years, but the grants may not be available for three. Also, this may influence

which districts are inspected first, leaving others waiting three years for any assistance. This should be spelled out in the policy and not left to the commission to decide.

- Finally, the timing of the grants. The drawn-out timeline presents issues for ensuring a quick turnaround for districts with the greatest need.

We continue to have concerns with House Bill 5830, which requires certain things be included in all new school buildings and remodel projects that cost more than \$250,000. The bill now includes a waiver process that could be helpful, but there should be a timeline for the commission to respond to any waivers so that entire construction projects are not held up. We also believe that specific security measures for buildings are best determined by the local district and community and should not be dictated by the state.

The legislation should also spell out that if a bond or sinking fund was approved by the voters before July 1, 2019, no part of that project is covered by this new requirement. Some districts will stretch their projects out over years to avoid disrupting the school year and, absent this provision, projects that have already been approved by voters would be required to include new things that were not in the original project proposal nor included in the ballot language.

Legislation will be introduced soon that has been developed with the Michigan Sheriffs Association, Michigan Chiefs of Police, numerous school mental health professional organizations and our organizations to address the long- and short-term issues in four key areas: protection, prevention, facilities and enforcement. The School Safety Reform Plan is comprehensive and delivers resources and personnel quickly to address school safety and student mental health.

Through a state grant program, we propose injecting seed money to districts to hire new school mental health professionals and to partner with local law enforcement to increase the number of school resource officers in our schools. We know that our counselor-to-student ratio is far from adequate, and that a key component to long-term prevention of school violence and other risky behaviors lies in the mental well-being of our state's children. These highly trained professionals can help identify early warning signs of a student that might lose her/his way before s/he harms others or self.

We also know that when students develop positive relationships with law enforcement officials like school resource officers, that can go a long way in preventing dangerous situations. Furthermore, these SROs can help stop violence by being eyes and ears in our buildings to protect students.

There is no perfect solution, however, the bills before you are parts of the larger school safety puzzle. We believe both the School Safety Reform Plan and this package of legislation could work together and urge you to consider our suggestions and the inclusion of the state grant program mentioned above.

We look forward to working together to prevent the next tragedy and to ensure that our students are supported, protected and successful. Please contact any of the organizations listed if you have any questions.