

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 782 (Delegate Atterbeary)
 Ways and Means

Study on Detecting Deadly Weapons in Public Middle and High Schools

This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to study how best to detect deadly weapons on public middle and high school properties and have schools rapidly report the detection of a deadly weapon to law enforcement. By December 1, 2025, MSDE must report its findings to the Speaker of the House and the House Ways and Means Committee in a manner that does not jeopardize school safety. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2025, and terminates June 30, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: No effect in FY 2025. General fund expenditures increase by *at least* \$340,000 in FY 2026 to conduct the study. It is unlikely that MSDE can complete the study by the December 1, 2025 deadline, as discussed below. No effect on revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	340,000	0	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$340,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Local school systems can likely participate in the required study and audit with existing resources. No effect on revenues.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The required study must include a comprehensive audit of the current security infrastructure used in each public school system in the State, as specified. It must also, at a minimum, include an evaluation of:

- any available methods not currently used by public school systems in the State and the feasibility of using those methods to help fill gaps or make improvements in the security system identified in the comprehensive audit;
- how the current security system could best be adapted to achieve better detection of deadly weapons and quicker reporting to law enforcement agencies when deadly weapons are detected;
- software that uses artificial intelligence to identify deadly weapons, as specified;
- an increased use of security cameras in public middle and high schools and their ideal placement; and
- an increased use of metal detectors, including handheld metal detectors, in public middle and high schools.

Current Law:

Safe to Learn Act

Chapter 30 of 2018, the Maryland Safe to Learn Act, made comprehensive changes designed to improve the safety of the State's public schools. The remainder of this section summarizes relevant provisions of the Act.

School Safety Subcabinet

The School Safety Subcabinet consists of the following individuals or their designees:

- the State Superintendent of Schools;
- the Secretary of Health;
- the Secretary of State Police;
- the Attorney General;
- the Secretary of Disabilities; and
- the Executive Director of the Interagency Commission on School Construction.

The State Superintendent or designee chairs the subcabinet, and the Executive Director of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) provides staff.

The Act required each local school system, by June 15, 2019, and regularly thereafter, to conduct a safety evaluation of each public school under its jurisdiction. The purposes of the evaluations are to (1) identify and, if necessary, develop solutions for physical safety concerns, including issues with building security and (2) identify and evaluate any patterns of safety concerns on school property or at school-sponsored events.

Maryland Center for School Safety

Chapter 372 of 2013 established MCSS as an independent unit within State government under the direction of a governing board chaired by the State Superintendent of Schools. Five years later, the Maryland Safe to Learn Act made MCSS an independent unit *within* MSDE and increased the mandated appropriation for MCSS's operations from \$500,000 to \$2.0 million annually. MCSS's duties include:

- assisting local school systems to identify resources and implement training for students and parents about relationship violence, identifying the signs of unhealthy relationships, and preventing relationship violence;
- analyzing data on School Resource Officers (SROs) and developing guidelines for local school systems regarding the assignment and training of SROs;
- certifying school safety coordinators;
- consulting with local school systems on safety evaluations;
- reviewing and commenting on school emergency plans; and
- reporting on life-threatening incidents that occur on public school grounds.

School Resource Officers and School Security Employees

The Maryland Safe to Learn Act defines an SRO as (1) a law enforcement officer assigned to a school in accordance with a memorandum of understanding between a local law enforcement agency and a local school system or (2) a Baltimore City School Police Officer, as defined in current law.

Each local school system must file a report with MCSS that identifies (1) the public schools that have an SRO assigned and (2) if no SRO is assigned to a public school, the adequate local law enforcement coverage that will be provided to the school.

Annually, the Governor must include \$10.0 million for the Safe Schools Fund to provide grants to local school systems and law enforcement agencies to meet the SRO/law enforcement coverage requirements established by Chapter 30. Grants must be made based on the proportion of public schools in each jurisdiction and may be used for school security employees.

A school security employee is an individual who (1) is not an SRO and (2) is employed by a local school system to provide safety and security-related services at a public school.

State Fiscal Effect: MSDE does not have staff with extensive expertise in school safety or weapons detection systems, as that expertise generally rests with MCSS. Therefore, MSDE likely has to procure a third-party contractor to conduct the study, including the audit component discussed below.

The required study has two main components: a study of how best to detect deadly weapons; and an audit of security measures in each local school system in the State. MSDE can complete the first component, the study of weapon detection methods, at a cost of \$100,000. Completion of the second component, the audit of local school systems, may be considerably more expensive.

The bill does not clearly define the scope of the required audit. It can be interpreted to mean an audit of security systems in all 630 middle and high schools in the State, or it can be interpreted to mean an audit of the safety evaluations conducted by all 24 local school systems under the Safe to Learn Act. If the scope is the former, the cost of the study likely exceeds \$2.0 million to visit and audit security systems in every school; however, if the scope extends only to local school systems, the cost is likely about \$240,000 (assuming an average cost of \$10,000 for each school system). As the bill specifies that the audit is for security infrastructure used in each public school system, this analysis assumes that the scope of the audit extends only to local school systems.

Therefore, general fund expenditures increase by an estimated \$340,000 in fiscal 2026 for MSDE to hire a third-party contractor to conduct the study and audit. To the extent that the bill's intent is to conduct an audit with a larger scope, expenditures increase accordingly. Given the need to procure a third-party contractor, which can typically take three to six months, and the scope and complexity of the study and the audit, it is unlikely that MSDE can complete the study by the December 1, 2025 deadline (six months from the bill's effective date).

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Center for School Safety; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 21, 2025
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