

Bill:	Senate Bill 1090	Date:	February 28, 2024
Title:	Maryland Center for School Safety - Statewide Secure Schools Emergency Response Program - Established	Committee:	Education, Energy & Environment
Position:	Favorable with Amendments	Contact:	Kim Buckheit kim.buckheit1@maryland.gov 443-902-0622

On behalf of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in favor *with amendments* to Senate Bill 1090.

MCSS fully supports county governments and school systems in making decisions about locally used and implemented school-based emergency notification systems and other layered approaches to school safety and security.

We appreciate Senator Waldstreicher collaboration with our office and the Department of Emergency Management in identifying amendments to the bill. These amendments incorporate the recommendations identified by local school systems, 9-1-1 centers, and emergency managers in our [Study of Emergency Notification in Maryland Public Schools](#).

Our working group of stakeholders, which included local and State representatives, also strongly believe that local governments and school systems are best situated to make decisions about locally used and implemented emergency communication and notification technology, particularly systems and technology that integrate into public safety answering points. The results of our study highlighted Maryland's existing Text-to-9-1-1 capabilities but also noted the need to continue to support local school systems in improving and sustaining reliable communication and notification systems including public address and intercom systems as well as cellular, wi-fi, and radio coverage in and around school buildings.

As such, MCSS respectfully recommends the following amendments to Senate Bill 1090:

Amendment 1: Eliminate the requirement for the procurement and implementation of a single statewide panic button system.

Amendment 2: Remove the requirement for technology to be certified by the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security under the Federal Support Anti-Terrorism by Fostering Effective Technologies Act](#).

Amendment 3: Establish a grant program that allows local school systems to make decisions on systems and technology to improve emergency notification and communication in coordination with local first responders and Public Safety Answering Points.

Amendment 4: Include other systems and equipment identified in our study as eligible projects, including intercom and public address systems, bi-directional antennas or boosters, and other technology that could address gaps in signal coverage or emergency notifications in general.

Amendment 5: Replace the fiscal year 2026 appropriation language from “shall” to “may.”

A wide array of Maryland stakeholders have worked to address emergency communication gaps and have advanced planning and tactical response coordination with local first responders. “Our review of the most high-profile nationwide school shooting incidents during the last two decades indicates that there continue to be gaps in interoperable and reliable communications. However, given the high cost of establishing a new single statewide panic button system, and, most importantly, a lack of compelling evidence of its potential efficacy, lead us to recommend a different course of action.

1. Investment in improved and reliable **intercom/public address systems** for all schools would provide the means by which school leaders can reliably communicate with the entirety of the school’s staff and students to alert them to danger and initiate a universal response protocol. After action reports from both the Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary School tragedies recommended improving the school’s intercom system. This remains a need for many Maryland schools.
2. Investment in **Bi-Directional Amplifiers (BDA)** to enhance on-site cellular/radio coverage would minimize significant gaps in cellular coverage on school grounds. Gaps in cellular coverage exist across the state and are particularly concerning in rural school locations, where cellular service is less reliable. BDAs improve service in the hardest-to-reach areas of a building and would support multiple aspects of school safety.
3. Investment in **interoperability improvements in public safety communications systems**, including CAD (Computer-Aided Dispatch)-to-CAD communications. CAD-to-CAD integration is a method of sharing 9-1-1 caller and response information seamlessly between public safety agencies. This allows public safety communicators to view real-time updates from 9-1-1 specialists and information relayed by first response units. Active assailants and other major school incidents will inevitably result in multiple public safety agencies responding to the location. In Maryland, dispatch for public safety agencies may not be integrated into one single Center.”

[Study of Emergency Notification in Maryland Public Schools \(Dec. 2023\)](#)

MCSS remains available to answer any questions and engage in discussions. Thank you again for taking the time to consider the information shared above as you consider Senate Bill 1090.