



Coalition for Safer Schools

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

RE: Senate Bill 756, Primary and Secondary Education -- School Safety and Student Wellbeing – Examination of Policies and Funding

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chairwoman Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Coalition for Safer Schools, I write in support of Senate Bill 756 (SB 756), Primary and Secondary Education – School Safety and Student Wellbeing – Examination of Policies and Funding. The bill makes common sense and needs updates to our State’s Safe to Learn Act¹, originally passed in 2018.

The Safe to Learn Act provides a strong framework for Maryland to keep our school communities safe, however, as the needs of our schools continue to adapt and change, so must our policies. SB 756 makes policy and funding-related changes to the Safe to Learn Act to ensure our schools are operating in as safe a manner as possible, and that the funding we are allocating is going to the right places, where schools truly need it.

Currently, under §7-1508(e) and §7-1508(g), \$10 million is being allocated *specifically and only* for the purpose of helping local school systems and law enforcement agencies meet the requirements for school resources officers (SROs) and adequate school security². Additionally, a local school system can pursue non-competitive grant funding for more school safety related issues (beyond just SROs), like conducting school safety evaluations, training assessments, behavioral health, and parent/student trainings³.

The issue having these funds separated creates, is that a school systems who does not need financial support provided currently in the SRO grant, is losing access to that funding. However, by re-assigning the funds allocated in §7-1508, it will open the door to more funding for *all* local school systems. It also allows each local school

¹ Senate Bill 1265 (2018 Regular Session), “*Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018*”, Maryland General Assembly

² Md. Code Ann., Education §7-1508(e)-(g), “*School Safety Coordinator, school resource officers, and school safety employees*”

³ Md. Code Ann., Education §7-1512, “*Safe Schools Fund*”

system to make decisions to use funding based off of what they need most – if a school system needs to use the grant money for SROs, SB 756 allows that. Similarly, if a local school system wants to use the grant money for one of the many other items outlined in §7-1512, they can also do that. Summarily, **SB 756 allows school systems, who know their districts best, to use direct grant money where it will help the most.**

The bill also requires that the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), and the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) review the state of physical security in schools, and the existing guidelines on school safety. To my knowledge, there has been no such multi-agency review of the condition of physical security of all school statewide which has been conducted in recent years. The physical security of our schools is the first barrier between the safety and wellbeing of students and staff and external threats, and appropriate review is crucial to maintaining this barrier.

Finally, the bill requires an evaluation of the execution of MCSS' functions and duties. Ensuring that we as a State are doing everything, we possibly can to support our local school systems, and schools themselves. Such an evaluation will ensure that our state's center for school safety is on par with this expectation.

Overall, SB 756 is common sense legislation which makes necessary changes to the Safe to Learn Act. These changes remove unnecessary limits on available funding, prioritize our local school systems, and ensure our State is making the safety and security of our school community and its stakeholder. For these reasons, the Coalition urges this committee produce a favorable report.

Respectfully,



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