
Bill:	Senate Bill 756	Date:	February 28, 2024
Title:	Primary and Secondary Education - School Safety and Student Well-Being - Examination of Policies and Funding	Committee:	Education, Energy & Environment
Position:	Favorable	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 of support for Senate Bill 756.

MCSS remains committed to assisting Local Education Agencies (LEA) in implementing a layered approach to school safety and fully supports county governments and school systems in making informed decisions about school safety strategies that meet the unique needs of their school communities.

The School Resource Officer (SRO) Grant program is a non-competitive grant program designed for LEAs and law enforcement agencies to meet statutory requirements of locals to provide each public school in Maryland with an SRO or adequate law enforcement coverage. It is important to note that **Senate Bill 756 does not remove the statutory requirements to assign SROs or provide adequate law enforcement coverage to every public school in Maryland.** However, the bill would increase flexibility for locals to use grant funding to invest in a variety of school safety and security strategies as part of a multi-pronged approach to school safety and security.

The Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018 (Senate Bill 1265, Chapter 30) ushered in a comprehensive approach to school safety and security in Maryland's Public Schools. As part of that approach, the Act established the Safe Schools Fund, authorizing grants for various school safety initiatives and programs. Included in the Safe Schools Fund is a mandatory appropriation of \$10 million annually for each public school to meet the requirement of an assigned SRO or adequate law enforcement coverage for each public school. Separately, the Safe Schools Fund is funded with \$600,000 per year, allocated at \$25,000 per school system.

Although some local governments rely heavily on the SRO Grant to support their SRO programs, the grant has not been fully utilized by all jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions fully or partially fund their local SRO programs and as such, their portion of the grant allocation at the end of the fiscal year goes unused. However, those school systems continue to have funding gaps to support their prevention, response, and recovery efforts.

The expanded grant categories identified in Senate Bill 756 would continue to allow LEAs access to funds to support their local SRO programs but also allow LEAs not currently applying for the grant access to the funds to address other identified gaps and vulnerabilities, reinforcing a continuous cycle of preparedness through assessment, identification, and correction.

School-based and system-level personnel must work collaboratively with their local first responders to prepare for the various emergency situations that can occur at a school. School-based emergency preparedness is complicated with many different stakeholders and events that must be planned for including severe weather, medical emergencies, transportation events, behavior escalations, large-scale special events like graduation and games, and unexpected danger inside or outside of the school building. Senate Bill 756 allows all LEAs access to grant funds to support existing school safety initiatives including SRO programs. The additional categories provided in Senate Bill 756 will assist locals in meeting the critical components of all-hazard readiness.

Thank you again for taking the time to review this information and we ask the Committee for a favorable report.