



Senate Bill 1090

Maryland Center for School Safety – Statewide Secure Schools Emergency Response Program – Established

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee

Date: February 28, 2024

From: Kevin Kinnally and Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 1090. While this bill purports to strengthen school safety, MACo contends that the bill's one-size-fits-all approach is not compatible with local emergency protocols and procedures and thus places an unwarranted fiscal and administrative burden on local public safety agencies and personnel.

While counties oppose the bill as introduced, MACo's concerns are addressed through amendments offered by the sponsor of the cross-filed House bill. As such, MACo would take no position on the bill with the following amendments:

- **Alter the program from a State-procured program to an opt-in grant program.**
- **Expand the eligible costs under the grant program to include installing/updating public address systems, intercom systems, and bi-directional amplifiers to improve emergency communications during critical incidents.**
- **Strike the language requiring the DHS SAFETY Act certification and allow the Maryland Center for School Safety to establish standards.**
- **Strike the mandated appropriation.**

While counties support the intent of this legislation, procuring a statewide system capable of integrating across several technological and organizational structures is challenging. While some jurisdictions have invested in panic button systems, they have coordinated with county emergency managers and local first responders to support local response processes. However, this bill establishes a one-size-fits-all state procurement approach that will not integrate with local public safety agencies.

Following the introduction of a similar bill in the 2023 session, the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) coordinated with the University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security to study emergency notification in Maryland schools. The study convened a workgroup of subject matter experts in emergency notification and response, including the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM), school safety experts from school districts across the state, county emergency managers, and 9-1-1 specialists. The workgroup researched school emergency communications in other states and reviewed publicly available after-action reports from high-profile school-based emergencies.

The results of the MCSS study highlighted Maryland's existing Text-to-9-1-1 capabilities. They found no evidence that this type of emergency notification program would be effective as a single solution to keeping schools safe. The study identified emergency communication gaps that require more immediate attention and would be less costly and easier to implement.

For these reasons, MACo requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 1090 as introduced. However, MACo would take no position on the bill with the amendments above, which reflect the findings and recommendations of the MCSS study.