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Subcommittees

Capital Budget

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Committee

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 416 Testimony – Public Schools – Active Shooter Safety Drills - Requirements
February 7 2024**

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, Colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to present on my bill HB 416 regarding notification requirements for active shooter drills and trainings. **This bill is a reintroduction of the identical bill that passed this committee and the House of Delegates unanimously during the 2023 session.**

Since the 1999 Columbine shooting, active shooter drills and trainings have become a reality in school emergency preparedness plans; before the pandemic, more than 95% of public schools in the United States had trained and drilled students on a lockdown procedure, with at least 40 states requiring such drills.¹ However, their implementation and effectiveness in preparing students in case of an active shooter and its effects on students' mental health is still widely unknown.² A preliminary study from Everytown concludes that active shooter drills in schools are associated with higher rates of poor mental health, including a 39% increase in rates of depression, a 42% increase in rates of stress and anxiety, a 23% increase in physiological health problems, and a 22% increase in concern over death, found in children as young as five years old up to high schoolers, their parents, and teachers.³

We want to prepare our students for emergency situations but not in such a way that does more harm than good. We do not mimic a fire, to prepare students for a potential fire in the building, and we should not mimic a school shooting to prepare students for that possibility either. For this reason, HB 416 outlines best practices for active shooter drills and trainings, collects more data on the efficacy of such measures, and educates families on safe gun storage in hopes of preventing a school shooting.

There are eight portions of this bill:

¹ [Nation's largest teachers unions call to end active shooter drills over fears they're traumatizing students | CNN](#)

² [Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study | Humanities and Social Sciences Communications \(nature.com\)](#)

³ [The Impact of Active Shooter Drills in Schools | Everytown Research & Policy](#)

- 1) At the beginning of the school year, local school systems should inform parents of a general schedule for these drills and trainings. During the school year, local school systems should provide notifications and information to parents and guardians in advance of active shooter drills and trainings as well as notification after they have occurred.
 - a. This communication should also include the type of drill and training (walkthrough, full-scale drill, etc.) and how students will be notified of a drill or training, and when it will start.
 - b. After the drill or training, parents should be notified and provided with information to help their students cope with, communicate about, and understand the drill.
- 2) The drills and trainings should be announced in advance to school personnel and students, clearly identifying that no threat is present.
- 3) Drills must not include live action simulations that mimic an actual incident or simulate a shooter or gun fire.
- 4) The policies surrounding the drills and trainings should be created with age- and developmentally appropriate content with the involvement of school personnel, including school-based mental health professionals.
- 5) Schools are required to identify staff and students who may need support during and after the drills and trainings, such as individuals with recent trauma or loss, individuals with disabilities, and others, and provide those individuals with coping strategies and additional resources to successfully complete and respond to the drills and trainings.
- 6) Schools are required to follow-up with staff and students after the drills and trainings, using a trauma-informed approaches to address students' and staff well-being.
- 7) Schools should track data about the efficacy and effects of these drills and trainings – including talking to school staff, students, and parents about their effects and modify accordingly. This data will be shared with the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), which will be required to partner with an institution of higher education or Federal Research institution to conduct research and analysis of the data and the effects and impacts of these drills and trainings.
- 8) On or before July 1, 2025, the MCSS will develop model content, in consultation with the Maryland State Police, that informs parents of Maryland's firearm storage laws. Each school system will then be required to share this model content at the beginning of each school year.

Supported by mental health professionals, school associations, child safety advocates, the Maryland Center for School Safety, educators, parents, and students, HB 416 has the opportunity to minimize the negative impacts of active shooter drills, while still keeping our young people safe.

Once again, in the current form, last legislative session this bill unanimously passed the Ways and Means Committee and the full House. I ask this committee for a favorable report on HB 416.