



Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities
at Kennedy Krieger Institute
Building Partnerships. Changing Lives.

February 7, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Information on HB416 - Public Schools - Active Shooter Safety Drills or Trainings - Requirements

Dear Chair Atterbeary,

The Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) at Kennedy Krieger Institute appreciates your introduction of the HB416 - Active Shooter Safety Drills or Trainings – Requirements bill. This legislation is an important step in creating safer school environments for students and staff, including students and staff with disabilities.

As you are aware, the MCDD is proud to be Maryland's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (UCEDD) and a member of the national Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD). MCDD links the community to vital services, research, and information to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Our mission is to provide leadership that advances the inclusion of people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities through preservice preparation and training; research and evaluation; community service and technical assistance; and information dissemination. This includes ensuring that people with disabilities can live and learn safely within their communities.

In collaboration with the National Center for Disability, Equity, and Intersectionality, the MCDD performed a legislative review of school safety policies throughout the nation. In the policies we found, there was minimal mention of students with disabilities when discussing active shooter drills. Some policies failed to specify the difference in approach of these drills for students with disabilities that we believe need to be explored when developing best practices.

We are in full support of this legislation and ask that the committee make students and staff with disabilities a direct priority when studying the effectiveness and psychological impact of active shooters drills. Students with disabilities often require accommodations and/or modifications to access school safety protocols safely and reliably. For example, those with physical disabilities and mobility aids may require alternate evacuation routes, individuals sensitive to loud sounds may require headphones during

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noisy evacuations, and students with behavioral support needs may require extra supports to address elopement concerns.

The MCDD supports the removal of any activities that may cause the drill to be traumatic for students or school personnel, such as drills including loud sounds or live exercises with individuals role-playing as an active shooter or victim. Additionally, we support effective communication requirement for such drills, providing adequate and appropriate information about drill scheduling to the students, families, and school staff prior to the drills as well as access to appropriate support services/accommodations during and after the drill for all students and staff, particularly those who identify as having a disability.

We encourage the committee to meet with stakeholders in the disability community to discuss potential next steps of the legislation, including in an advisory capacity to ensure the accessibility of any evacuation or lockdown emergency protocols.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maureen van Stone", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Maureen van Stone, Esq., M.S.
Assistant Vice President
Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities
Kennedy Krieger Institute