

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 127 (Senator Watson, *et al.*)
 Education, Energy, and the Environment and
 Judicial Proceedings

Maryland Center for School Safety - Firearm Detection Platforms - Evaluation
(Maryland Firearm Detection Platform Act)

This bill requires the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), in collaboration with specified entities, to conduct an evaluation of firearm detection platforms, and to report on the results of the evaluation by April 30, 2025. It further authorizes funding from the Safe Schools Fund to be used to assist local school systems in procuring and maintaining firearm detection platforms that MCSS has assessed for use on school property. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$223,600 in FY 2025 for staffing and a third-party evaluation. Out-year expenditures reflect annualization, inflation, and the termination of one-time costs. No effect on revenues.

| (in dollars) | FY 2025 | FY 2026 | FY 2027 | FY 2028 | FY 2029 |
|----------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Revenues | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| GF Expenditure | 223,600 | 87,200 | 91,000 | 95,000 | 99,200 |
| Net Effect | (\$223,600) | (\$87,200) | (\$91,000) | (\$95,000) | (\$99,200) |

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: To the extent that local school systems apply for and receive grants to purchase firearm detection platforms, local revenues and expenditures increase.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A “firearm detection platform” is defined as any technology platform or system that uses artificial intelligence and other validation mechanisms to (1) analyze video streams from surveillance cameras in real time for the detection of firearms and (2) proactively notify law enforcement and other public safety authorities.

MCSS must collaborate with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), public safety agencies, local school systems, the University System of Maryland, and other public institutions of higher education to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation must assess:

- the capabilities of each firearm detection platform, as specified;
- federal certification, if any;
- cost and maintenance requirements, including data security;
- documented examples of performance in similar locations at which the platform would be used; and
- the platform’s ability to adequately meet the needs of local school systems and public institutions of higher education.

Current Law:

School Safety Subcabinet

The School Safety Subcabinet consists of the following individuals or their designees:

- the State Superintendent of Schools;
- the Secretary of Health;
- the Secretary of State Police;
- the Attorney General;
- the Secretary of the Department of Disabilities; and
- the Executive Director of the Interagency Commission on School Construction.

The State Superintendent or designee chairs the subcabinet, and the Executive Director of MCSS provides staff.

Maryland Center for School Safety

Chapter 372 of 2013 established MCSS as an independent unit within State government under the direction of a governing board chaired by the State Superintendent of Schools. Five years later, the Maryland Safe to Learn Act made MCSS an independent unit *within*

MSDE and increased the mandated appropriation for MCSS's operations from \$500,000 to \$2.0 million annually. MCSS's duties include:

- assisting local school systems to identify resources and implement training for students and parents about relationship violence, identifying the signs of unhealthy relationships, and preventing relationship violence;
- analyzing data on school resource officers (SROs) and developing guidelines for local school systems regarding the assignment and training of SROs;
- certifying school safety coordinators;
- consulting with local school systems on safety evaluations;
- reviewing and commenting on school emergency plans; and
- reporting on life-threatening incidents that occur on public school grounds.

Each local school system must promptly inform MCSS of any critical, life-threatening incidents that occur on school grounds and invite the center to participate in a required after-action review of the incident. At the conclusion of the review, the local school system must file a report with MCSS, and the center must report to the Governor and General Assembly on lessons learned from the incident and any recommendations for improving school safety.

Safe Schools Fund

The Safe Schools Fund is administered by the subcabinet, which must establish procedures for local school systems and law enforcement agencies to apply for grants from the fund. The purpose of the fund is to provide grants to local school systems to enhance school safety, and it may be used only for that purpose, including:

- conducting training for students and school personnel on de-escalation situations and identifying and reporting behaviors of concern;
- conducting training of assessment teams;
- conducting school safety evaluations;
- establishing formal and anonymous mechanisms for reporting safety concerns;
- reimbursing local law enforcement agencies for SRO training;
- enrolling school security employees in specified training;
- developing plans to deliver school-based behavioral health and other wraparound services to specified students;
- outreaching to the broader school community to improve school safety;
- providing information to students and parents on traveling safely to and from school; and

- assisting local school systems to provide and monitor traffic control measures in the vicinity of the school.

The fund consists of:

- \$600,000 paid annually to the fund from fines collected from uninsured motorists;
- \$10.0 million for grants to local school systems and/or law enforcement agencies for SROs;
- money appropriated in the State budget to the fund;
- money from any other source; and
- interest earnings.

State Expenditures: MCSS advises that it lacks the expertise to conduct the mandated evaluation of firearm detection platforms, and must therefore contract with a third-party evaluator. The estimated cost of the evaluation is \$150,000 to assess three different platforms; each additional platform is estimated to cost \$30,000. The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) assumes that the evaluation covers three platforms.

The bill authorizes the Safe Schools Fund to be used to assist local school systems in procuring firearm detection platforms. MCSS advises that the fund currently has two main sources of income: the \$600,000 from uninsured motorists required by statute and the \$10.0 million that is passed through to local school systems and law enforcement agencies for SROs. Therefore, this analysis assumes that up to \$600,000 is available to help local school systems, although DLS notes that statute authorizes those funds to be used for up to 10 other purposes, listed above.

MCSS advises that it needs four additional staff to oversee grants to local school systems to procure firearm detection platforms and to provide technical support to local school systems. However, the bill does not require MCSS to provide technical support; it only authorizes money from the Safe Schools Fund to be used to pay for the platforms.

Therefore, general fund expenditures increase by \$223,622 in fiscal 2025, which accounts for a 90-day start-up delay from the bill's July 1, 2024 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring of one grant administrator to oversee the awarding of grants from the Safe Schools Fund to local school systems, and \$150,000 for the third-party evaluation of firearm detection platforms. It includes salaries, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

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|---|------------------|
| Position | 1.0 |
| Salary and Fringe Benefits | \$66,366 |
| Evaluation | \$150,000 |
| Other Operating Expenses | <u>\$7,256</u> |
| Total FY 2025 State Expenditures | \$223,622 |

Future year expenditures reflect full salary with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses; they also reflect the termination of a one-time expense for the evaluation.

Local Fiscal Effect: To the extent that local school systems apply for and are awarded grants for the purchase of firearm detection platforms, local revenues and expenditures increase. Based on funding available, it is assumed that total revenues and expenditures do not exceed \$600,000 annually.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Community College; University System of Maryland; Morgan State University; St. Mary's College of Maryland; Maryland Center for School Safety; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Baltimore City Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Department of Legislative Services

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