

Letter of Information

House Ways and Means Committee

House Bill 496: Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion

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On behalf of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of information regarding House Bill 496.

The Safe to Learn Act of 2018 (STLA) set aggressive Statewide standards for school safety. The STLA addressed both the physical safety and security and the behavioral health needs of students. The law established requirements for reporting, mandated training, and emergency planning while also providing funding for public school evaluations, transportation safety, training, school resource officers, and school-based behavioral health and wrap-around services.

Maryland's impressive demographic and geographic diversity means that every school system and school within a school system is unique. The STLA's built-in flexibility allows each school system to assess and evaluate the needs within individual school communities in order to make informed decisions about resource allocation. Additionally, school systems and law enforcement agencies throughout the State have worked closely together to determine the need for SROs and/or adequate law enforcement coverage to serve school communities. The factors to be considered in making that decision range from a specific school's unique climate and proximity to the closest first responders, size of the student body and facilities, and other community resources. Recognizing that each school represents a microcosm of the community it serves, MCSS does not recommend changes in the law that would take away the ability for localities to determine what is best for their school communities.

MCSS and the School Safety Subcabinet believe that the STLA's ethos of flexibility should carry over into the administration of grant funding, which would enhance the ability of local officials to identify priority school safety initiatives including but not limited to grant funding for SROs *and* mental health services, both of which are foundational to creating safe school environments. These funds have helped provide coverage for after school programs and events as well as increased patrols in and around schools.

Finally, lines 24 and 25 of page 11 of House Bill 496 read, "(F) THE STATE BOARD SHALL ADOPT REGULATIONS TO CARRY OUT THIS [] SECTION." Please note that the State Board of Education has no oversight or regulatory authority over the Maryland Center for School Safety or the Safe Schools Fund. The School Safety Subcabinet serves as the governing board of MCSS, and the Subcabinet approves Safe Schools Fund grants and has regulatory authority pursuant to Md. Code, Educ. Art. §7-1503(g)(12).

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate House Bill 496. For additional information, please contact me at kate.hession1@maryland.gov.

