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SENATE BILL 938 Primary and Secondary Education – School Safety and Student Well-Being – Examination of Policies

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

DATE: March 15, 2023

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

SUMMARY OF BILL: SB 938 requires the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), and the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) to review the state of physical security in schools and existing guidelines, increases the funding mandate for the Safe Schools Fund, and establishes guidelines for distributing grants from the Fund. Section 2 of this bill requires MCSS to conduct an external review of its performance while Section 3 requires MSDE, in consultation with the Maryland Longitudinal Data Systems Center (MLDSC) to analyze the effect of State and local policies in place from SY 2018 to SY 2023 on school safety and student well-being.

EXPLANATION: The mandated review of the state of physical security in schools and existing guidelines on school safety carried out by MSDE, MCSS, and IAC must begin on or before July 1, 2024, and occur every two years thereafter. Local school system reports on critical, life-threatening incidents already reported to MCSS must be incorporated into the review. After the review, MCSS, MSDE, and IAC must create guidelines to maximize school safety and minimize impediments to students and staff.

SB 938 also increases the funding mandate for the Safe Schools Fund from \$10 million to \$20 million. Funds in the Safe Schools Fund are then disbursed as grants to local school systems under the direction of the School Safety Subcabinet to provide adequate school resource officer (SRO) and local law enforcement (LLE) coverage. This bill would allow the subcabinet to determine the amount of grant funding rather than require the subcabinet to allocate a specific amount.

The external review required of MCSS's functions and duties in Section 2 must be initiated by December 1, 2024, and completed by December 1, 2025. MCSS must report the study's results to the Governor and General Assembly by January 15, 2026. In addition, \$200,000 is mandated in FY 2025 to complete the study. The analysis required under Section 3 must use school data on various safety and well-being areas and must be provided to the Governor and General Assembly by July 1, 2024.

In total, this bill increases mandated appropriations by \$10.2 million in FY 2025 and \$10 million in all future years and would be an addition to ongoing enhancements for education and student support services. Funding in the State budget for K-12 education is at record levels in FY 2024, at approximately \$8.8 billion. Existing funding can already be utilized to enhance efforts to boost school security and

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safety at the local level. The FY 2024 budget also includes record funding targeted at safety in public schools. On top of the \$10 million in existing mandated funding for the Safe Schools Fund, the Governor’s FY 2024 budget includes \$10 million for security improvements to public schools, \$3 million to support schools and childcare centers at risk of hate crimes and bias incidents, and \$3 million to help local school systems conduct safety evaluations. The safety evaluations are supported by surplus funding in the Safe Schools Fund.

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) is charged with submitting a balanced budget to the General Assembly annually and strives to create a structurally balanced budget, in which the growth in spending is less than the growth in revenues. In light of current economic uncertainty and the potential for a downturn, the Department urges caution in passing legislation significantly expanding State required expenditures without offsetting revenues. General fund mandates can have the effect of crowding out the State’s ability to fund staffing, salary adjustments, and in general invest strategically and holistically in State government’s human capital and the infrastructure required to carry out State government’s mission. State government must be intentional, disciplined, and strategic with its allocation of State funding to ensure maximum impact toward priority outcomes.

General Fund Structural Budget Outlook, Fiscal 2024 – 2028 (\$ millions)

	Est. 2024	Est. 20235	Est. 2026	Est. 2027	Est. 2028
Structural Balance	\$337	\$232	\$263	\$529	\$1,113
Adjusted for Blueprint				-\$963	-\$1,207

Department of Legislative Services, January 2023 Fiscal Briefing

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