

HB 515 Testimony – Public Schools – Active Shooter Safety Drills – Requirements

April 4, 2023

Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, thank you for the opportunity to present on HB 515 regarding notification requirements for active shooter drills and training. My name is Niky Zhuang, and I am a junior at Poolesville High School. I am here today to tell you all about an incident that happened at our school just two weeks ago, one that represents the reality for all the students in Maryland.

A fire broke out in our school and when the fire alarm sounded during dismissal, the teachers did not realize it and the PA system announcements announcing the fire were completely drowned out by the clamoring students. No one understood what was happening, and no one really cared, because all they wanted to do was go home. Now, Poolesville High School consists of a main building, science building, and portables; the students in the science building usually get to the bus loop by walking through the school. Because students did not realize the severity of the situation, they continued to enter the main building – the site of the fire. Any student would know better and take the long way around, but that was not the case. Imagine a fire in the building, half of the student body panicking and pushing people out of the way to leave the school, and the other half completely ignoring everyone, thinking it was a drill, and walking right back into the burning main building. After I left, I heard that fire trucks came, and students were let back into the building around thirty minutes later. I use the phrase “I heard” because the faculty at Poolesville High School never followed up with any students or parents about the incident. We attended school the next day, as if nothing had ever happened. The school

never followed up with any students or parents. This is not what I would call a safe and healthy learning environment.

Members of the committee, what I described was just a fire in the school. Now imagine the same scenario, but this time with a school shooter. A living, breathing person who can see and hear and move. Imagine what it would be like if our students walked in on a person holding a gun, thinking it was just a drill. This is why we need the Shooter Notification Bill. We need our schools to be responsible. We need our students and parents to be informed of when and what drills will happen. This bill will save lives, so students will know to avoid real emergencies. This bill will provide support, so that those with trauma and other disabilities will not be frightened by the drills. This bill will track data on efficacy to further improve the training process. As the number of school shootings increase, the flaws in our safety precautions have become more and more apparent, not just to us students, but also to those with malicious intentions. Our school drills need systemic reform, and the first step begins with HB 515. Thank you for your time.