

Jaxon O'Mara

HB515

Favorable

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on HB 515, Active Shooter Safety Drills or Trainings. My name is Jaxon O'Mara and I am a graduate of Great Mills High School in St. Mary's County. If you don't remember, on March 20th, 2018, a gunman entered my school and killed one of my classmates while wounding another. This is a day that I will never forget, and the events of that day haunt me. Although I was not in danger the day of the shooting, the anxiety and fear I felt that day follows me around.

I attended a protest in Washington D.C. over the summer that was interrupted by an individual moving toward the speakers and yelling that he had a gun. I grabbed my best friend's hand and we ran in the opposite direction as fast as we could. And we weren't the only ones running, hundreds of other young people attending the protest ran with us, terrified for what might come next. We are a generation of students traumatized by the constant mass shootings in our country and dramatized, unplanned active shooter drills can instill an even deeper fear, not knowing if you are in danger or if it is *just* a drill.

It's for that reason that I am here to support HB515. HB515 will save students further trauma by preventing surprise active shooter drills and putting a stop to other extreme drill procedures like the inclusion of fake blood or the sound of gunshots. HB 515 ensures that all parents, students, and school staff would be notified prior to the drill, to allow the members of the school community to prepare themselves. This bill would also require that drills be developmentally appropriate for students and trauma-informed, meaning that schools can tailor their drills to match their student population and provide the best, most appropriate training possible.

I know that myself and members of my community are still sensitive to active shooter drills, and there are many victims of gun violence or loved ones of those impacted by gun violence that can relate in all of our communities. This bill would bring active shooter drills to an appropriate standard and prevent unnecessary trauma for students, parents, and school staff. Until we find a way to stop school shootings, we need to prepare our students the best way that we can, without further traumatization. Thank you for your time today, I urge a favorable report on HB515.