

Hello members of the Ways and Means committee,

My name is Nina Atrokhov, and I am currently a junior at Bethesda Chevy Chase HS in Montgomery County. I am here today encouraging you to support House Bill #515.

Lockdown drills are terrifying. A few times each year students participate in a drill where they have to prepare if there is an active shooter in the school. Teachers lock the doors, close the blinds, turn off the lights, and students go as far away from sight as possible; all of this in preparation, in case one day this danger becomes a reality. Huddled next to all your classmates, many of our minds go to the thought of what if this wasn't a drill. You hear the door handle shake, your teacher looking at all the students with sadness in their eyes, a student crying in the corner, and you feel the anxiety behind all the soft chatter. HB 515 will allow students to mentally prepare for the emotional burden of a lockdown drill and receive the help they need to be able to attempt to grasp the situation. This will allow parents to have a conversation about the drill and be there to support their children. Gun violence in schools is sadly a reality for many, this year in many schools around the state students have been having to go into real lockdowns. In many of these scenarios it is not clear if the lockdown is real or a drill. This year my school was put on a real lockdown, they had believed that someone brought a gun into school. I was taking a test in my 5th period class when they announced the lockdown and my teacher, believing it was a drill, made us continue at our desks. My phone kept ringing with frightened texts from my friends, my sister. Thankfully, there wasn't a gun. However, if there was, I would have been an easy target. If this bill was in place my teacher would have known that it was not a drill because we all would have known in advance if it was. This bill will not only help make these drills more manageable, but it will save lives. Therefore, I encourage you to support Bill #515.

Thank you for your time.

Before the House Ways and Means Committee
HB0515 - Active Shooter Drill Notification Act

SUPPORT

Good afternoon committee members and Chair Atterbeary,

My name is Nico D'Orazio, and I am a Junior from Thomas S. Wootton High School in District 17. I am here today advocating for the support of HB0515, regarding active shooter safety drills.

Last week, my school held an unannounced fire drill, and my mind immediately began preparing for the worst. My peers and I were worried that a school shooter had pulled the fire alarm and that our lives were in danger. Though this was only a fire drill, the fears that my peers and I experienced were unmatched by our fears when we undergo an active shooter drill. I can vividly remember my fear that these shooter drills could be real, and the deep anxiety they caused for my peers and me. The bitter reality of today is that these fears exist everyday for students, and are only amplified during an active shooter drill. Without mental health resources at hand after a drill, time and time again we have had to cope with these stressors on our own.

Notifying students and parents before conducting an active shooter drill is a necessity for the sanctity of Maryland students' mental health. Rather than permanently traumatizing students with worries of their own lives, HB0515 provides students the opportunity to practice lifesaving procedures and access mental health resources. When students are notified beforehand, they can emotionally prepare and intentionally practice lockdown techniques. Furthermore, with mental health resources provided after a drill, HB0515 provides a channel for students to work through

any emotional distress caused by an active shooter drill. Had HB515 been in place during the active shooter drills my peers and I have gone through, we would not have had to cope with the stress of an active shooter on our own.

Opponents of this bill state that active shooter drills with prior warnings will be ineffective and students will not treat them as important. However, students of today understand the seriousness and potentiality of a school shooter, signifying that students would treat drills as important. Moreover, because HB0515 requires the Maryland Center for School Safety to collect data on the effectiveness of these drills, we can ensure that the drills truly serve Maryland's students. The purpose of every active shooter drill is to train, not to traumatize. Therefore, I urge you to vote in favor of HB0515 in order to truly support the over 800,000 students of Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Good afternoon Delegates,

My name is Nick Dimitriadis. I'm a proud student at Towson High School and a candidate for Student Member of the Board of Education of Baltimore County. I'm thrilled and honored today to testify before you in support of HB515, Delegate Solomon's legislation to create greater transparency, communication, and student support as it relates to our schools' active shooter drills.

For so many students across Maryland, and nationally, right now, the need for comprehensive active shooter drills has become increasingly important. For me personally, this issue hits close to home.

Just a few months ago, the Towson High School community experienced a wave of threats against students, parents, and staff that left our community shaken for several weeks. What stunned me just as much as the threats themselves, however, was the lack of communication between our school and our students and families that deeply deteriorated not only the academic success and social and emotional well-being of our students, but the relationship between our school's leaders and community members. Just weeks ago, we had our first active shooter drill of the year, and while I'm appreciative of the progress we have made in Baltimore County to build more communication, it goes without saying that there is much work to be done across our district and ones throughout Maryland to make our drill process more effective.

HB515 is an exhaustive proposal to systematically improve the process by which students are prepared to respond to the threat of an active shooter while in school. Whether it be requiring schools to identify staff and students who may need support during and after drills, informing families and school personnel in advance of them occurring, or tracking data about their efficacy and effects on staff, students, and parents, this bill is a step in the right direction for building stronger, safer schools across Maryland. Now more than ever, amidst a recent surge in school violence throughout our state, I hope you'll support this crucial legislation that puts student's safety and wellness at the forefront of bettering our educational systems. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Before the House Ways and Means Committee

HB0515 - Public Schools - Active Shooter Safety Drills - Requirements

SUPPORT

Good evening delegates and audience.

It's an honor to have the opportunity to advocate for my support of HB515 with such a distinguished audience of amazing people. My name is Kiana Hajikarimloo and I am a sophomore at Northwest high school, in Montgomery county.

I clearly remember my first day of school in America. I was a freshman and didn't know anything about the American school system. Everything was new to me and I was trying to look at other students to learn what to do and where to go. Everything seemed very interesting to me and I was so excited that I finally got to attend school in America. After the first two weeks of school, I was in my volleyball class, talking to one of my new friends when I heard several alarms around the gym. I was shocked and didn't know what to do. "What is going on?" I asked my friend. "This is a shooter safety drill. Don't be scared. This is just practice." She told me calmly. I thought about my parents and texted them. Nobody knew what was going on at the school. Some people were saying this is an actual lockdown but other people were saying it is just a drill. But I wondered why? Why didn't the staff, parents, and students have a schedule for shooter safety drills? That afternoon, around 5 o'clock the principal sent an email that it was an actual lockdown and there was an active shooter on the campus. Still, when I think about that day I feel terrified. What if something happened to any of the students that day?

We all know that gun violence is a critical issue in the U.S., but it is not going anywhere. The only thing that we can do is to better prepare ourselves for these situations by providing notice to parents, guardians, students, and school staff about drill schedules. It is our right especially as students to know what is exactly going on in school. In 2022, there have been 32 gun incidents at either elementary, middle, or high school in Maryland. This is an issue that needs to be addressed as soon as possible and the most effective way is to adopt HB515 which prepares schools and students for these situations. By adopting HB515 to incorporate drills in the annual schedule for Maryland local schools, Maryland provides safety and preparation for students across the state so there would be fewer gun violence incidents in schools.

Gun violence shouldn't be something that we are worried about in the 21st century. Every student deserves to go to school without any fear of getting killed in a place that was supposed to be an educational environment. As students, our main issue should be about grades and tests, not guns and deaths. After all, isn't it better to be safe and prepared than to be sorry?

Thank you for your time.

Before the House Ways and Means Committee
HB515 – Active Shooter Drill Notification Act
SUPPORT

The goal of any type of preparedness drill is to empower, not to traumatize. For nearly a century, public school safety drills – practicing what to do in the event of a fire, tornado, air raid – have been part of the public school landscape. With the purpose of rehearsing a response to a hazardous situation when no threat is present, these drills are ideally conducted so that if an emergency does occur everyone knows what to do, and is familiar with what those actions feel like.

Added to the common emergency drills with which all are familiar, the horror of school shootings created a new threat, requiring a different response. Though well-intended – drills to practice what to do if a shooter threatens a school have had very mixed results. Having experienced those drills – as the parent of a public school student, as a public school teacher, and as a public school policy maker – I know that the substance of this bill infuses good intent with common sense, and intentional focus on the emotional impacts such drills have on those who experience them.

It takes a village to create a community where everyone feels safe, welcome and valued. The notice provisions of this bill – sharing in advance the timing and type of active shooter drills with school staff, students and families – embrace that truth. Empowering everyone involved with the knowledge of what will happen and when, along with intentional focus on those more likely to experience stress, anxiety and trauma as a result of participating – is the way we best use the power of the village. And I can tell you, having experienced these drills from the inside, the trauma experienced by students and staff is real. The bill’s inclusion of after-action response – calming measures to support participants in processing after the drill concludes – is essential to creating an environment where everyone feels valued and safe.

Active shooter drills remain controversial. There is little evidence to support their efficacy, in part because the structure and use of these drills across the country is erratic, and the events for which they “prepare” thankfully are rare. This bill’s inclusion of a data collection and monitoring

function is essential if policy-makers are to make good decisions about whether, and if so how, active shooter drills should be routinely incorporated in school preparedness work.

HB515 also includes another important tool to empower the village – requiring schools to share information about Maryland’s child access prevention laws and laws relating to the safe storage of firearms, as well as best practices for safely securing a firearm from children. Another common sense step that will save lives – and we need look no further than the actual events in a Newport News elementary school to see why these measures to educate are needed.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lynne Harris
Silver Spring, Md



Maryland's First
Nationally Accredited
Sheriff's Office



50 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Md. 20850
240-777-7000
240-777-7148 Fax

SHERIFF MAXWELL C. UY

February 13, 2023

VIA E-MAIL: jared.solomon@house.state.md.us

Honorable Jared Solomon
222 Lowe House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 515 – Public Schools – Active Shooter Safety Drills Requirements

Dear Delegate Solomon:

This letter confirms my stated support for enactment of HB 515. As you know, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) is actively involved in promoting school safety and staffs a Community Engagement Officer (CEO) at Magruder High School. In our view, the proposed legislation contains valuable enhancements to the current status of the Maryland Center for School Safety and current school safety programs as they relate to active shooter drills.

First, I think the requirement to study the effectiveness and impact of active shooter drills by researching and analyzing data collected from local school systems provides an essential mandate to continually improve such drills by using a data-based approach that allows for an annual evaluation and updates in the model policy. Second, I think the provision for increasing mental health services for students and school staff who need such services before, during and after such active shooter drills will go far to allay the fears of parents and staff who may be particularly vulnerable to the notion of active shooter drills generally. Third, I am particularly pleased that the bill provides notification procedures for parents at the beginning of the school year and a requirement that any active school drill procedure occurring during school hours must be developmentally and age-appropriate, as well as avoid specific scenarios – loud sounds imitating gun fire or explosions and role playing – that may be disturbing and traumatic for students and school personnel. In my view, all of these legislative changes can only improve the active shooter drills currently utilized, and enhance public support, especially that of parents, that is essential for the overall success of such drills.

In sum, MCSO supports this legislative effort to enhance the requirements for active shooter drills in schools. Thank you for your efforts and consideration.

Sincerely,

Maxwell C. Uy
Sheriff