

SENATOR JEFF WALDSTREICHER
Legislative District 18
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—
Vice Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee

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Joint Committee on Federal Relations



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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Jeff Waldstreicher
**Senate Bill 677 – Maryland Center for School Safety – Statewide Secure Schools
Emergency Response Program – Established**

February 24, 2023

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Every day, schools across Maryland—from Baltimore City to Garrett County—experience myriad health and safety events that require real-time communication, collaboration, and engagement across a variety of safety stakeholders. Whether it’s responding to a violent incident, an isolated medical emergency, or a mental or behavioral health emergency, faculty and first responders need the ability to communicate seamlessly. Senate Bill 677 would enable this communication by establishing the Statewide Secure Schools Emergency Response Program.

When a medical emergency takes place on school grounds, it is imperative that accurate information about the emergency is relayed between school staff and first responders. These emergencies can happen across school campuses, at athletic events, after-hours, or during arrival and dismissal. This bill would ensure that every school, no matter their location or financial resources, has the necessary technological tools to communicate effectively with our first responders.

School safety has traditionally focused on physical hardening measures like metal detectors, but communication during emergency incidents is critical to reducing response time, delivering accurate information to 911 centers, and providing ongoing instruction to school campuses. The delivery of accurate information between 911 centers and school campuses through proximity alerting technology can allow first responders to proactively notify school campuses in a defined geographic area of real-time public safety threats. While some schools have emergency plans, many lack an easy-to-use method to directly communicate with 911 centers in the event of an emergency on a school campus.

Likewise, with “swatting” incidents on the rise, allowing schools to communicate with 911 and simultaneously check-in with all faculty and staff can help calibrate emergency response in the event of false reports, thereby preserving first responder time and resources.

National events in the past year, such as those in Uvalde, Charlottesville, and most recently in Lansing, have highlighted the challenges we face in keeping our schools and communities safe. This legislation is an important step in ensuring the safety of all students, faculty, and staff in Maryland, regardless of their location or financial resources. Maryland continues to be a leader in the school safety space, and this program is a vital part of a holistic emergency response plan. I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 677.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Waldstreicher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "W".

Senator Jeff Waldstreicher