

MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 515 PUBLIC SCHOOLS – ACTIVE SHOOTER SAFETY DRILLS OR TRAININGS - REQUIREMENTS

POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION

April 4, 2023

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (“CRSD”) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public-school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. CRSD recognizes that school safety is paramount given the increase in school shootings. We submit this letter of information to share our member organizations experiences and concerns with active shooter drills and to bring several issues to the attention of Committee members.

There is almost no research confirming the value of active shooter drills for preventing school shootings or protecting the school community when they do occur.¹ Active shooter drills are reactive rather than proactive in preventing gun violence. In addition, when they do occur there is risk that they cause emotional distress and have other unintended negative consequences on students and educators. A national study found that 60% of student respondents to a national text message poll of youth ages 14-24 years said that drills make them feel scared, unsafe, sad, and hopeless.² Another study found that experiencing an active shooter drill in high school was associated with significant increases in student fear, inflated perceptions of risks, and a decrease in perceptions of school safety.³ Research has also identified fidelity challenges to implementing active shooter drill strategies that may contribute to emotional distress.⁴

¹ Everytown for Gun Safety (2/20/2023). *The impact of active shooter drills in schools: Time to rethink reactive school safety strategies*. Retrieved, 3/31/2032 from <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills-in-schools/>

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² Moore-Petinak, N., Waselewski, M., Patterson, B. A., & Chang, T. (2020). Active shooter drills in the United States: A national study of youth experiences and perceptions. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67(4)2 509-513. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1054139X20303207>

³ Huskey, M. G. & Connell, N. M. (2021). Preparation of provocation? Student perceptions of active shooter drills. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 32(1) 3-26. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0887403419900316>

⁴ Moore-Petinak, N., Waselewski, M., Patterson, B. A., & Chang, T. (2020). Active shooter drills in the United States: A national study of youth experiences and perceptions. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67(4)2 509-513. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1054139X20303207>

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While HB 515 puts some guardrails in place around active shooter drills such as notifying parents and students in advance of drills and requiring mental health support for students and educator experiencing distress, until more is known about the effectiveness of active shooter drills, we suggest that active shooter training be limited to educators and school staff, who have ultimate responsibility for carrying active shooter drills. In addition, ensuring that all schools and classrooms have the basic infrastructure used in active shooter drills, such as secure entrances and exits to school buildings, locks on classroom doors, should be a priority before requiring student participation. Better understanding of the critical components of effective shooter drills, how to successfully implement them, and how to best prepare students is also needed. And other systemic approaches and interventions, such as those that focus on school climate, providing academic support, and improving relationships among teachers, students, and their school may help foster safe and supportive learning environments.⁵ For example, school climate has been shown to be significantly correlated with a decrease in student fear and levels of perceived risk, as well as an increase in perceptions of school safety.⁶

We hope this information is helpful as the Committee considers how best to address school safety that is based on evidence of effectiveness and minimizes emotional distress.

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⁵ Zullig, K. J. (2020). Active shooter drills: A closer look at next steps. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67, 465-466. Retrieved from [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(20\)30426-2/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(20)30426-2/fulltext)

⁶ Huskey, M. G. & Connell, N. M. (2021). Preparation of provocation? Student perceptions of active shooter drills. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 32(1) 3-26. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0887403419900316>