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Capital Budget

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Joint Audit and Evaluation  
Committee

**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 515 Testimony – Public Schools – Active Shooter Safety Drills - Requirements**  
**April 4, 2023**

**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, Colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to present on my bill HB515 regarding notification requirements for active shooter drills and trainings.

Since the 1999 Columbine shooting, active shooter drills and trainings have become a reality in school emergency preparedness plans; before the pandemic, more than 95% of public schools in the United States had trained and drilled students on a lockdown procedure, with at least 40 states requiring such drills.<sup>1</sup> However, their implementation and effectiveness in preparing students in case of an active shooter and its effects on students' mental health is still widely unknown.<sup>2</sup> A preliminary study from Everytown concludes that active shooter drills in schools are associated with increased rates of depression, stress and anxiety, and physiological health problems overall, in children as young as five years old up to high schoolers, their parents, and teachers.<sup>3</sup>

We want to prepare our students for emergency situations but not in such a way that does more harm than good. We do not mimic a fire, to prepare students for a potential fire in the building, and we should not mimic a school shooting to prepare students for that possibility either. For this reason, HB515 outlines best practices for active shooter drills and trainings, collects more data on the efficacy of such measures, and educates families on safe gun storage in hopes of preventing a school shooting.

There are four portions of this bill:

- 1) The first addresses how parents, students, and staff should be notified about trainings and drills. Active shooter drills and trainings are often conducted without notifying parents, students, and staff beforehand. Such an approach may cause heightened anxiety and lead to panic. The American Academy of Pediatrics cited an experience at a high school in

<sup>1</sup> [Nation's largest teachers unions call to end active shooter drills over fears they're traumatizing students | CNN](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study | Humanities and Social Sciences Communications \(nature.com\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Impact of Active Shooter Drills in Schools | Everytown Research & Policy](#)

which the school “deceived” its students<sup>4</sup> into believing they were in an active shooting. Students vomited, fainted, escaped over fences, stampeded in hallways, and even wrote “farewell notes” to parents.

This bill would require that school systems inform parents, staff, and students in advance of the drills and trainings. Specifically, parents, staff, and students must be notified the month in which the drills or trainings will occur. Parents should also be provided with information to help their students cope with, communicate about, and understand the drills and trainings.

- 2) The second part of the bill outlines the planning process and implementation of drills. Policies surrounding drills should be created with age- and developmentally appropriate content. Drills and trainings should be announced in advance to school personnel and students, clearly identifying that no threat is present, and the drill must not include simulations that mimic an actual incident. Schools are required to identify staff and students who may need support during and after the drills, such as individuals with recent trauma or loss, individuals with disabilities, and others, and provide those individuals with coping strategies and additional resources to successfully complete and respond to the drills. No live simulations are allowed but these types of training exercises can be conducted voluntarily after school hours.
- 3) The third portion of this bill focuses on data collection to evaluate the impact of drills on students and staff. Schools will be required to collect data and feedback from school staff, students, and parents, to modify drills accordingly. The Maryland Center for School Safety will collaborate with either an institution of higher education or a federal or national research entity to study the effectiveness and psychological impact of shooter safety drills and trainings by researching and analyzing data collected from local school systems. The Center will identify best practices for drills and trainings and periodically update them based on feedback from local schools.
- 4) The last part of the bill deals with child access prevention measures. The Maryland Center for School Safety will consult with the State Department of Police to develop model content that informs parents of Maryland’s child access prevention laws and laws relating to the safe storage of firearms. These materials will then be provided annually to families and be updated as necessary.

Supported by mental health professionals, school associations, child safety advocates, the Maryland Center for School Safety, educators, parents, and students, HB 515 has the opportunity to minimize the negative impacts of active shooter drills, while still keeping our young people safe.

**After making bipartisan improvements to HB 515 as introduced, it unanimously passed the Ways and Means Committee and the full House. I ask this committee for a favorable report on HB 515.**

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<sup>4</sup> [Pediatricians call for schools to end active shooter trainings that could traumatize students | CNN](#)