



Testimony in **Support** of

Public Schools - Active Shooter Safety Drills - Requirements

HB515

Executive Director Karen Herren
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence

February 15, 2023

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and distinguished members of the Committee,

Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence (MPGV) is a statewide, grassroots organization dedicated to reducing gun deaths and injuries throughout the state of Maryland. We urge the committee for a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 515 which seeks to address how active shooter safety drills are carried out in school systems within the state of Maryland.

The United States experiences more school shootings than nearly all other nations. While deaths from school shootings pale in comparison to the overall toll of more than 110 daily gun deaths in the U.S., each school incident is tragic and traumatizing for both the local community and the nation as a whole - particularly because schools are intended to be safe spaces for children to grow and learn.

One prominent school safety strategy is active shooter drills. These drills typically require students and school staff to remain on lockdown in a designated area and practice specific emergency procedures, which often include staying quiet, locking the door, and turning off lights, but can also feature tactics such as fighting back, distracting the shooter, and evacuating. In some instances the drills are unannounced and simulate an actual active shooter event.

Evidence is unclear that these drills have any positive impact on the outcomes of school shooting incidents.¹ Nevertheless, under the circumstances it is hard to argue against them wholesale. That said, there is a growing body of evidence that some are being implemented in ways that cause harm even without a shooting event actually occurring. Studies on the mental health of the students, teachers,

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills-in-schools/>

and parents who experience them demonstrate increases in anxiety, stress, and depression. Further evidence reveals a lasting concern over physical health with long term concerns that this reality may ultimately have lifelong impacts on the generations coming up within this framework.

This legislation seeks to provide a framework for drills to offsets some of these negative impacts by ensuring that they are carried out in the least damaging way possible and that evaluators are in place to assess and adjust programs. While the research is evolving around the impact of these drills, indications are clear that drills should not mimic actual incidents, there should be advance notice when a drill is planned, and school personnel should help create appropriate drill content that involves trauma-informed approaches to address students' well-being.

HB515 further mandates that the Department shall create model content to inform parents of the state's firearm storage laws and best practices for safe firearm storage. The US Secret Service has undertaken two studies of targeted school violence, covering nearly 40 years of incidents. They found that three-quarters of school shooters acquired their firearm from the home of a parent or close relative (73 percent in the first study and 76 percent in the second study). The Secret Service's second study of incidents, from 2008 to 2017, revealed that in nearly half of the shootings, the firearm was easily accessible or was not stored securely.² Strong firearm storage laws (See also Jaelynn's Law, SB858/HB307) combined with effective public education is a critical component to reducing the likelihood of these horrific events.

MPGV urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 515.

² https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/Protecting_Americas_Schools.pdf