



JARED SOLOMON
Legislative District 18
Montgomery County

Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

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and Economic Development

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Committee

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 515 Testimony – Public Schools – Active Shooter Safety Drills - Requirements
February 15, 2023

Ways and Means Committee

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, 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 drills¹. However, their implementation and effectiveness in preparing students in case of an active shooter and its effects on students' mental health is still widely unknown². 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 teachers³.

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. Some active shooter drills were conducted without notifying parents, students, and staff about the drill 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

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

² [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 \(nature.com\)](#)

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

which the school “deceived” its students⁴ 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. 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.
- 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. Data is to be shared with the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), which will be required to partner with a Maryland institution of higher education to conduct research and analysis of the data and the effects and impacts of these drills.
- 4) The last part of the bill deals with child access prevention measures. MSDE, law enforcement, school systems and other relevant groups will collaborate to create model content that informs parents of Maryland’s child access prevention laws and laws relating to the safe storage of firearms. This includes best practices for safely securing a firearm. These materials will then be provided in the annually to families and be updated as necessary.

Supported by mental health professionals, school associations, child safety advocates, teachers, school staff, parents, and students, HB 515 has the opportunity to minimize the negative impacts of active shooter drills, while still keeping our young people safe. As such, I ask for a favorable report on HB 515.

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