

Before the House Ways and Means Committee
HB515 – Active Shooter Drill Notification Act
SUPPORT

The goal of any type of preparedness drill is to empower, not to traumatize. For nearly a century, public school safety drills – practicing what to do in the event of a fire, tornado, air raid – have been part of the public school landscape. With the purpose of rehearsing a response to a hazardous situation when no threat is present, these drills are ideally conducted so that if an emergency does occur everyone knows what to do, and is familiar with what those actions feel like.

Added to the common emergency drills with which all are familiar, the horror of school shootings created a new threat, requiring a different response. Though well-intended – drills to practice what to do if a shooter threatens a school have had very mixed results. Having experienced those drills – as the parent of a public school student, as a public school teacher, and as a public school policy maker – I know that the substance of this bill infuses good intent with common sense, and intentional focus on the emotional impacts such drills have on those who experience them.

It takes a village to create a community where everyone feels safe, welcome and valued. The notice provisions of this bill – sharing in advance the timing and type of active shooter drills with school staff, students and families – embrace that truth. Empowering everyone involved with the knowledge of what will happen and when, along with intentional focus on those more likely to experience stress, anxiety and trauma as a result of participating – is the way we best use the power of the village. And I can tell you, having experienced these drills from the inside, the trauma experienced by students and staff is real. The bill’s inclusion of after-action response – calming measures to support participants in processing after the drill concludes – is essential to creating an environment where everyone feels valued and safe.

Active shooter drills remain controversial. There is little evidence to support their efficacy, in part because the structure and use of these drills across the country is erratic, and the events for which they “prepare” thankfully are rare. This bill’s inclusion of a data collection and monitoring

function is essential if policy-makers are to make good decisions about whether, and if so how, active shooter drills should be routinely incorporated in school preparedness work.

HB515 also includes another important tool to empower the village – requiring schools to share information about Maryland’s child access prevention laws and laws relating to the safe storage of firearms, as well as best practices for safely securing a firearm from children. Another common sense step that will save lives – and we need look no further than the actual events in a Newport News elementary school to see why these measures to educate are needed.

Thank you for your consideration,

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