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**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, and the ENVIRONMENT**

**SENATE BILL 127: Maryland Center for School Safety- Firearm Detection Platforms Evaluation  
(Maryland Firearm Detection Platform Act)**

**DATE: JANUARY 24, 2024**

**POSITION: OPPOSE**

The Baltimore Teachers Union opposes Senate Bill 127, which would authorize funds for the procurement, maintenance, and evaluation of firearm detection platforms administered by Maryland Center for School Safety, in collaboration with other state agencies.

The Baltimore Teachers Union represents 8,280 teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, clinicians, librarians, secretaries, community school site specialists, bus transportation aides, and many more school-based and central office support staff. We are 4 out of 5 workers in Baltimore City Public Schools, serving 75,811 students and their families. Our national union, the American Federation of Teachers, has over 1.7 million members in the United States and its territories.

SB 127's focus on firearm detection platforms does not reflect evidence-based practices shared by school safety experts and lacks sufficient oversight to ensure that these expensive efforts will actually advance school safety.

In Baltimore city, where our district will not commit to evidence based safety measures like ensuring that all classroom doors can lock, they have spent millions already on “pilot” programs of the EVOLV Weapons Detection System. The focus on technology diverts attention away from other needed reforms, such as gun control legislation, and research based policies and practices that promote school safety and student well-being.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DePaoli, J. & McCombs, J. (2023). *Safe schools, thriving students: What we know about creating safe and supportive schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/701.445>. Accessed 19 January 2024.  
[National Center for School Safety. \*School safety at a glance\*.  
https://www.nc2s.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/School-Safety-At-A-Glance.pdf](https://www.nc2s.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/School-Safety-At-A-Glance.pdf) Accessed 18 January 2024.

The National Institute for Justice (NIJ) found that video cameras, metal detectors, and technology-aided identification have a limited evidence base.<sup>2</sup> The efficacy of the Evolv AI Weapons Detection Systems which is already deployed in BCPSS is questionable, at best. In Dorchester County, MD, nearly half (41.9%) of 'alerts' pinged by Evolv AI Weapons Detection Systems countywide between March 1 and October 1, 2022 were 'benign,' meaning the scanners accidentally mistook laptops, eyeglass cases and strollers for weapons. In that seven month period, 33,515 total alerts in Dorchester schools resulted in only 46 weapons obtained by the authorities. The reverse also holds true: In Utica, NY, local authorities phased out Evolv systems from public schools after they failed to detect a knife used in a violent stabbing on school grounds.

At a time when the popularity of Evolv weapons detection technology has been precipitously declining in cities around the country due to "questions about whether the new technology is effective" (NYT), Baltimore's families deserve assurance that wasting money on such ineffectiveness of Evolv systems in other jurisdictions will not be replicated in City Schools.

Weapons detection technology does little to prevent violence outside of the school building. The Washington Post reports that 14 of the 21 school shootings in the first five months of 2023 occurred outside of the school building.<sup>3</sup> Baltimore City Public Schools has experienced many high-profile murders and acts of violence over the last year and the majority took place at the entrance, parking lot, athletic facilities, or in the communities surrounding the school. investments in AI based weapons detection does not prevent this.

Educators, students and community members agree that relationships and well resourced mental health and violence trauma informed interruptor programs are better than any AI weapons detection system. These systems, including metal detectors are only as effective as the procedures and relationships that are implemented in the school. In Baltimore City leaders need to invest in evidence-based practices of more mental health support like school counselors and social workers in every school, not throwing away money to new technology with no proof of efficacy.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Teachers Union urges the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee to broaden their definition of school safety measures to include prevention and ensure that MCSS has the capacity to adequately administer and evaluate SB 127. Maryland desperately needs to invest in the safety of our schools. Maryland students and educators deserve the most effective and researched based strategies. Firearm detection platforms do not meet these criteria. **BTU opposes Senate Bill 127.**

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<sup>2</sup> Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab. (2016). Comprehensive Report on School Safety Technology. National Institute of Justice. <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/comprehensive-report-school-safety-technology>

<sup>3</sup> Elwood, Karina. "Schools are hoping AI-powered weapons detectors can improve school safety." *Washington Post*, 11 June 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/06/11/school-weapons-detectors-ai-virginia/>. Accessed 18 January 2024.