
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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 Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland's public school systems. CRSD is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of ALL students, including pregnant or parenting students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status, and reducing barriers to learning for ALL students. CRSD opposes SB 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 bill'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 addition, 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.¹

First, the National Institute for Justice (NIJ) found that video cameras, metal detectors, and technology-aided identification have a limited evidence base.² In addition, Premier AI-driven weapons detection platforms have failed to detect knives, a preferred weapon among high school students, 42% of the time. In one district a Glock firearm passed through the scanners undetected.³ Additionally, 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.⁴ Similarly, in Baltimore City, many high-profile murders over the last year and a half took place at the entrance, parking lot, athletic facilities, or in the communities surrounding the school.

¹ 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> Accessed 18 January 2024.

² 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>

³ Blad, Evie. "Schools Turn to AI to Detect Weapons. But Some Question the Tech's Effectiveness." *Education Week*, 12 April 2023,

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/schools-turn-to-ai-to-detect-weapons-but-some-question-the-techs-effectiveness/2023/04>. Accessed 18 January 2024.

⁴ 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.

Administrators and district leadership who have purchased the expensive weapons detection technology say that, “Relationships trump any system you have.” Ultimately, weapon detection technology is only as effective as the procedures and relationships that are implemented in the school. Maryland schools need more assistance with this key human component, something that this bill does not provide.

Second, school safety experts agree that a combination of strategies that include prevention, response, and recovery are needed. Practices with a clear and consistent evidence base include the creation of a positive school climate, support for social emotional learning and restorative practices, and anti-bullying programs. To prevent weapons from entering school buildings, the National Center for School Safety (NCSS) recommends an attentive environmental approach including interpersonal reporting systems, threat assessments, effective communication with law enforcement, and effective school-focused door lock policies and signage.^{5 6 7}

Third, the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) needs to put in place additional oversight, protocols, and accountability measures before it is given additional responsibilities. A state audit of the MCSS and the Safe Schools Fund published in January 2023,⁸ found that MCSS distributed less than half of the funds to Local Education Agencies, and failed to provide sufficient supporting documentation for the funds that were expended. More concerning, the audit found MCSS lacked adequate written policies and procedures for administering the Safe Schools Maryland tip line. Clear and effective policies and communications are essential for effective school violence prevention measures. Effective procedures and policies are necessary to ensure that funds are being administered consistent with evidenced based practices and rigorous evaluation is being conducted.

Finally, a comprehensive evaluation should be undertaken before a technology solution is adopted.

For these reasons, CRSD 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.

We urge an unfavorable report on SB127.

For more information contact:

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⁵ Messman, E., Heinze, J., Hsieh, H.-F., Hockley, N., Pomerantz, N., Grodzinski, A., Scott, B., Goldstein, N., & Zimmerman, M. (2022). Anonymous Reporting Systems for School-Based Violence Prevention: A Systematic Review. *Health Education & Behavior*, 10901981211073734.

⁶ Koffkey, C., & Heinze, J. (2021). School Safety & Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (Video). <https://www.nc2s.org/resource/school-safety-crime-prevention-through-environmental-design-cpted-video/>

⁷ Progress Report: Crisis Timeline and Law Enforcement. (n.d.).

⁸ “Maryland Center for School Safety.” *General Assembly of Maryland Department of Legislative Services*, 11 January 2023, <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabPDF/MCSS23.pdf>. Accessed 18 January 2024.

CRSD Members

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Disability Rights Maryland

The Choice Program at UMBC

Maryland Office of the Public Defender

Public Justice Center

FreeState Justice

ACLU of Maryland

Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law) at Kennedy Krieger Institute