

<b>Bill:</b>	Senate Bill 127	<b>Date:</b>	January 24, 2024
<b>Title:</b>	Maryland Center for School Safety - Firearm Detection Platforms - Evaluation	<b>Committee:</b>	Education, Energy, and the Environment
<b>Position:</b>	Letter of Information	<b>Contact:</b>	Kim Buckheit <a href="mailto:kim.buckheit1@maryland.gov">kim.buckheit1@maryland.gov</a> 443-902-0622

On behalf of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of information for Senate Bill 127. MCSS remains committed to assisting Local Education Agencies (LEA) in the implementation of a layered approach to school safety. The inclusion of emerging technologies is one element of a well designed school safety plan.

Senate Bill 127 requires MCSS to conduct an evaluation of and make recommendations for *firearm detection platforms*. To conduct a comprehensive evaluation of these systems and make practical recommendations, MCSS must not rely solely upon vendor documentation of effectiveness. In evaluating these systems it will be vital to independently (1) review system manufacturer literature; (2) review existing software security and privacy documentation and audits; (3) conduct independent laboratory testing; and (4) conduct operational testing. It is important to note that regardless of the evaluation results, some systems may not work reliably in all real-life situations and not all technology or systems are best for all schools. Therefore, it will be crucial that we include potential limitations when recommending these systems.

In order to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of this nature, MCSS would require the assistance of an impartial technical research organization as MCSS does not possess the necessary technical staff to perform such an extensive system assessment. Furthermore, unless system manufacturers offer their products for testing at no cost, MCSS will need to procure each system that is tested.

Additionally, maintaining prevention and mitigation programs and personnel, while integrating a firearm detection platform may be financially burdensome to some LEAs. Firearm detection platforms rely upon the use of cameras within a school and for effective performance, each camera must operate at a minimum of Full High Definition (FHD 1080P) resolution. Not all cameras installed prior to 2020 meet this (FHD or higher) minimum standard thus, some systems may require LEAs to upgrade existing cameras that fall below the threshold (HD or lower) in order to implement a firearm detection platform. In addition to upgrades of existing cameras, it may be necessary to install additional cameras, particularly on the exterior of buildings, further increasing unanticipated costs. Although, LEAs would be able to procure

recommended systems through the Safe Schools Fund. The Safe Schools Fund<sup>1</sup> has been funded with \$600,000 dollars (\$25,000 per school system) for the last three years, which would not be enough to fund system-wide implementation of such systems.

Finally, artificial intelligence and emerging technologies for school safety are rapidly evolving. To limit the risk of LEAs acquiring outdated systems, the ongoing evaluation and recommendation of real-time video surveillance systems that use artificial intelligence or other mechanisms to identify firearms and alert first responders is necessary. This involves staying up-to-date on industry developments and being mindful of the initial publication year of the required recommendation report, particularly if a firearm detection platform is procured after that year. As always, MCSS reinforces the need for schools to continue allocating resources to support layered school safety efforts related to the prevention and mitigation of violent behaviors.

Thank you again for taking the time to consider this information as you consider Senate Bill 127.

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<sup>1</sup> The Safe Schools Fund includes funding that is separately allocated for School Resource Officers and adequate law enforcement coverage in the amount of \$10MM and \$600,000 for the categories eligible under Ed. Art. §7-1512(f).