Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB1167.

My name is Ben Yelin, and I am the Program Director for Public Policy & External Affairs at the University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security. I am also a public-school parent, and care deeply about the safety and security of all Maryland students and staff. During the interim, our organization worked with the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) and the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) to conduct a comprehensive, wide-reaching study on the advisability of a Statewide Secure Schools Emergency Response Program, or "panic button" in Maryland schools. As part of our study, we spoke to representatives of state and local school safety officers, representatives from the Maryland 9-1-1 board, local and State emergency managers, and local public safety answering point personnel. In addition to these stakeholders, we also spoke with representatives from North Carolina, which had recently enacted a statewide program similar to the one proposed here. Our team also conducted a review of the after-action reports (AARs) of previous high-profile school-based emergencies (mostly active assailant events) to determine whether an app-based or centralized "panic button" or school-based emergency notification system would have been useful in preventing or mitigating the casualties of those events.

Our report, based on extensive research and stakeholder input, recommended against the use of a statewide panic button system. Our research indicated that the burden or cost of implementing such a system, especially in lieu of other needed upgrades to public safety technology, outweighs any potential benefits. Our stakeholders noted that communications failures during previous real-world incidents or simulated exercises were not due to any inability to contact 9-1-1 at the outset of an event, but rather on other technological failures, such as: insufficient public address systems, poor cellular and WiFi coverage inhibiting the distribution of real-time alerts, and lack of proper coordination between the responding agencies. Our study of after-action reports from high casualty school-shootings supports these conclusions as well. In each of the studied incidents, students, faculty, and staff were able to reach 9-1-1 to request emergency assistance without delay. There have generally not been issues contacting emergency services rapidly, which is the purported problem a new emergency notification system would be intended to solve. Rather, communications issues centered around interoperability challenges between responding services, the inability to communicate with on-campus students and staff over a reliable and easily accessible loudspeaker system to initiate a lock-down, and the inability to send real-time text alerts or emails, due to poor cellular or WiFi coverage.

Additionally, there is evidence that a cell phone alert app that notifies teachers, staff, and/or students to multiple kinds of emergencies, such as medical emergencies or emergencies in the local area but not on the school campus, could be harmful rather than helpful in an active assailant emergency. In one high-

profile incident we studied, the app's notifications were frequently ignored by teachers and staff because it alerted them to nearby incidents. Ultimately, this resulted in a delayed response when there was an on-campus assailant because the notification was either heard and ignored, or not received at all because teachers habitually turned off their cell phones at the start of the school day to avoid interruptions.

In lieu of a mandatory statewide system as proposed here, our study recommended investments that would best address communications shortcomings:

- Improved and reliable intercom/public address systems
- Bi-directional amplifiers to enhance on-site cell/WiFi coverage
- Interoperability improvements in public safety communications, including Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD)-to-CAD communications.

We certainly understand the concern about communications during school-based emergencies and commend the bill sponsor and supporters for taking an interest in this subject. However, given the lack of compelling evidence for the efficacy of such a statewide panic button system program, it is our belief that there are better and more effective ways to address school-based emergency communications issues. Specifically given the limited resources available to pay for these needed improvements, we cannot support a bill that mandates an appropriation for a program that is not supported by evidence-based research.

We respectfully request an unfavorable report on HB1167 and we are happy to answer any questions.