



OPPOSE - HB1167
Maryland Center for School Safety - Statewide Secure Schools Emergency Response Program
- Established

Maryland Department of Emergency Management
Hearing Date: 21 FEB 2024

Chair Vanessa Atterbeary
Ways and Means
Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Atterbeary,

School safety is one of the most critical responsibilities of the government, and as a Department whose mission includes disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and response, we are deeply aware of the threats that schools face today. It is with that awareness that the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) writes **in opposition to HB1167 - Maryland Center for School Safety - Statewide Secure Schools Emergency Response Program - Established.**

The Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) led a study this summer after the introduction of the first version of this bill in the 2023 General Assembly session. MCSS convened a workgroup of subject matter experts in emergency notification and response including MDEM, school safety experts from school districts across the State, county emergency management, and Public Safety Answering Point (a.k.a. 9-1-1 Center) leaders to evaluate evidence from past school incidents across the nation. This study was not legislatively mandated; workgroup members dedicated time and effort in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a school panic button system by a thorough review of evidence-based practice.

After reviewing numerous after action reports, speaking with other states and evaluating the evidence, **the work group concluded that a statewide school panic button system would not be the most effective way to improve school safety.**



Wes Moore | Governor
Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor
Russell J. Strickland | Secretary

When lives are at stake, investment should be made in evidence-based solutions to increase safety, and the workgroup makes several alternative recommendations for investment in the published study. MDEM supports investment in those alternatives.

MDEM recognizes that some local jurisdictions have opted to invest in panic button systems, and the Department supports the choice of local school officials to implement safety measures that have been coordinated with local first responders in support of local response processes. However, this bill establishes a one-size-fit-all state procurement approach that may not integrate well with local management of first response procedures.

MDEM also recognizes that these types of statewide systems have been mandated in other states on the basis that a panic button system provides the opportunity to contact 9-1-1 without having to make a call that may give away someone's position. Maryland has demonstrated leadership in the area of Text-to-9-1-1 and has had Statewide Text-to-9-1-1 capability since 2020. Only a handful of states have universal text-to-9-1-1, and it is easy to see why panic buttons would be an attractive emergency notification system in those areas without it.

Lastly, the inclusion of the [DHS SAFETY Act](#) as a required provision of procurement in this bill, while certainly well-intentioned, would significantly hamper competitive procurement for the statewide system. According to DHS, the SAFETY Act, "provides incentives for the development and deployment of anti-terrorism technologies by creating systems of risk and litigation management. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that the threat of liability does not deter potential manufacturers or sellers of effective anti-terrorism technologies from developing and commercializing technologies that could save lives." In other words, this certification has nothing to do with the platform or vendor's efficacy, performance, or other measures that would indicate its ability to meet the needs of school systems. **Currently, a single vendor is certified to provide this type of product under the SAFETY Act**, and that vendor is not a small, minority, woman, or veteran-owned business. As Maryland makes strides toward increasing investment in minority, woman, and veteran-owned businesses, this requirement does the opposite.

In conclusion, MDEM urges the Committee to vote unfavorable HB1167. If you have any questions, please contact Anna Sierra, MDEM legislative liaison: anna.sierra1@maryland.gov.