

Bill:	House Bill 1167	Date:	February 19, 2024
Title:	Maryland Center for School Safety - Statewide Secure Schools Emergency Response Program - Established	Committee:	Ways & Means
Position:	Opposed	Contact:	Kim Buckheit kim.buckheit1@maryland.gov 443-902-0622

On behalf of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in opposition to House Bill 1167.

MCSS fully supports county governments and school systems in making decisions about locally used and implemented school-based emergency notification systems and other **layered approaches** to school safety and security. However, House Bill 1167 applies a one-size-fits-all approach focused only on notification following an emergency. Additionally, the bill, as drafted, could prohibit minority, women, and veteran-owned businesses from being eligible to respond to a request for proposal because of the requirement in the bill that the technology shall be [certified](#) by the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security under the Federal Support Anti-Terrorism by Fostering Effective Technologies Act](#).

Following the introduction of a similar bill, Senate Bill 677, in the 2023 legislative session, MCSS coordinated with the University of Maryland, Center for Health and Homeland Security (CHHS), to engage in a study related to emergency notification in Maryland schools. The study convened a working group of Maryland stakeholders to review existing school notification systems and the feasibility and desirability of instituting a State led program in Maryland. The group researched school emergency communications in other states and reviewed publicly available after-action reports from high-profile school-based emergencies. The outcome of this study was published in December 2023 and was made available to stakeholders and on the MCSS website: [Study of Emergency Notification in Maryland Public Schools](#).

The results of our study highlighted Maryland's existing Text-to-9-1-1 capabilities and found no easily identifiable evidence that this type of emergency notification program would be effective as a single solution to keeping schools safe. In fact, the study identified emergency communication gaps that require more immediate attention and would be less costly and easier to resolve. Specifically, the following needs were identified as more advantageous than a single statewide emergency notification system.

1. Investment in improved and reliable **intercom/public address systems** for all schools would provide the means by which school leaders can reliably communicate with the entirety of the school's staff and students to alert them to danger and initiate a universal response protocol. After action reports from both the Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary School tragedies recommended improving the school's intercom system. This remains a need for many Maryland schools.
2. Investment in **Bi-Directional Amplifiers (BDA)** to enhance on-site cellular/radio coverage would minimize significant gaps in cellular coverage on school grounds. Gaps in cellular coverage exist across the state and are particularly concerning in rural school locations, where cellular service is less reliable. BDAs improve service in the hardest-to-reach areas of a building and would support multiple aspects of school safety.
3. Investment in **interoperability improvements in public safety communications systems**, including CAD (Computer-Aided Dispatch)-to-CAD communications. CAD-to-CAD integration is a method of sharing 9-1-1 caller and response information seamlessly between public safety agencies. This allows public safety communicators to view real-time updates from 9-1-1 specialists as well as information relayed by first response units. Active assailants and other major school incidents will inevitably result in multiple public safety agencies responding to the location. In Maryland, dispatch for public safety agencies may not be integrated into one single Center.

As mentioned in our study, to the extent that there had been communication difficulties during previous emergencies, it was usually due to a lack of proper coordination between responding agencies. Local training for school personnel and first responders in incident command system (ICS) and exercises that test agency-to-agency communication and public notification systems would advance coordination capabilities in Maryland.

MCSS remains available to answer any questions and engage in discussions. Thank you again for taking the time to consider the information shared above.