Anna Kate Cagle
Public Health Law Clinic
University of Maryland Carey School of Law

500 W. Baltimore St.
Baltimore, MD 21201
publichealth@law.umaryland.edu

Testimony in Support of House Bill 782

Study on Detecting Deadly Weapons in Public Middle and High Schools

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"There is at least one place, other than a home, in which every person, whether a child or an adult, should feel absolutely safe and secure from harm: *school*."[1]

The Public Health Law Clinic submits this testimony in support of House Bill 782 to initiate a study to determine how best to detect and report deadly weapons in Maryland public middle and high schools. In 2010, there were fifteen school shootings in the U.S. Since then, the annual number of these tragedies has increased by more than two thousand percent, with 349 school shootings occurring in 2023.[2] Research indicates that improving safety measures in schools is an effective tool to prevent targeted attacks and other violence.[3] By assessing the current security deficiencies in schools and evaluating how best to fill these gaps, House Bill 782 will be a first step to improving the safety of students and staff in Maryland public schools.

The U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) conducted a study of thirty-seven incidents of targeted violence in K-12 schools in the U.S. to identify risk factors for these tragic events. While NTAC concluded that improving school security is an effective tool to prevent violence, it noted that no two schools have identical security needs.[4] Accordingly, each school should undergo a comprehensive assessment of present security gaps to be able to recommend and implement the most effective solutions. By requiring the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) to meet with members of each local school system to assess the physical and technological security measures currently used in public middle and high schools and identify any areas of improvement, HB 782 will facilitate the most effective recommendations to create safer schools.

Similar to the NTAC Report, the Sandy Hook Commission studied the Connecticut tragedy to make recommendations for schools to prevent similar events and other violence. In the report, the Commission explained that while schools cannot eliminate the risk of violence, they can prevent and reduce the incidence of these events by improving security measures and implementing safe school design and operation strategies.[5] If preventative measures fail and a dangerous situation arises, the report emphasized the importance of schools having systems in place that immediately notify law enforcement. The report explained that "every second counts between the initiation of a threatening event and the arrival of emergency responders," with "[s]econds and minutes equat[ing] to lives lost or saved."[6] By aiming to improve deadly weapon detection and reporting time, HB 782 could save lives.

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[1] THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION, FINAL REPORT OF THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION 4 (2015).
[2] K-12 SCHOOL SHOOTING DATABASE, *How Many School Shootings? All Incidents from 1966-Present*, https://k12ssdb.org/all-shootings (last visited Feb. 17, 2025).
[3] THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION, FINAL REPORT OF THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION 29-31, 40 (2015); Blair Ames, *Making Schools Safe for Students*, 218 NAT'L INS. JUSTICE 1, 2-3 (2019).
[4] Blair Ames, *Making Schools Safe for Students*, 218 NAT'L INS. JUSTICE 1, 2 (2019).
[5] THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION, FINAL REPORT OF THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION 4 (Mar. 6, 2015).
[6] THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION, FINAL REPORT OF THE SANDY HOOK ADVISORY COMMISSION 4, 26 (2015).

New technology presents an opportunity to improve school safety without the negative consequences of traditional security measures. Companies have recently incorporated Artificial Intelligence into surveillance technology to identify and report deadly weapons in schools before they are used. Although this technology is new and evolving, it is a promising tool that could decrease the time it takes to detect and report deadly weapons in schools, thus preventing the incidence and severity of violent events.[7] Additionally, this technology could improve school safety without adding to student stress. Research demonstrates that visible security measures in schools, such as metal detectors and school resource officers, increase fear and anxiety among students without improving safety or preventing violence. [8] Therefore, requiring MCSS to evaluate the need and feasibility of integrating software, such as Artificial Intelligence Technology, with existing security cameras will increase school safety and law enforcement communication time while preserving student mental health.

Conclusion

Children and adults should not have to worry about their safety at school. The first step to improving school safety and preventing violence is to identify security weaknesses and assess the feasibility of incorporating security measures to address these shortcomings. For these reasons, we request a favorable report on House Bill 782.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Public Health Law Clinic at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law and not by the School of Law, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, or the University of Maryland System.

[7] Amy K Bolin, *A New Approach to Early Detection and Privacy in School Security*, ADVANCING SECURITY WORLDWIDE (March 1, 2024), https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/articles/2024/03/schools/early-detection-privacy/.

[8] Billie Gastic, *Metal Detectors and Feeling Safe at School*, 43 EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY 486, 486 498 (2011); Abigail Hankin et al., *Impacts of Metal Detector Use in Schools: Insights From 15 Years of Research*, 81 *Journal of School Health* 100, 100-106 (2011); Matthew T. Theriot & John G. Orme, *School Resource Officers and Students' Feelings of Safety at School*, 14 YOUTH VIOLENCE & JUVENILE JUSTICE 130 (2024).