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Ways and Means Committee

Subcommittees

Early Childhood and
Special Education

Revenues



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

H.B. 0076 – Local School Systems – School Safety – Grant Allocations

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Delegate Mike Griffith, and I respectfully request a favorable report on H.B. 76: *Local School Systems – School Safety – Grant Allocations*.

H.B. 76 is a straightforward bill that would allow local education agencies (LEAs) to reapply within the same fiscal year for additional funding through the Safe Schools Fund (SSF), administered by the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS).

To qualify for reapplication, an LEA must fully expend its initial grant allocation and demonstrate a need for additional funding within that same fiscal year. The decision to approve a second allocation would remain at the discretion of MCSS, the agency responsible for administering the SSF statewide and best equipped to evaluate the availability and appropriate distribution of remaining funds.

This change is necessary because, under current law, the SSF receives an annual \$10 million appropriation to support LEAs and local law enforcement agencies in meeting annual reporting requirements related to law enforcement coverage in public schools, most commonly through School Resource Officers (SROs). Each year, funding is distributed using a set formula rather than a needs-based process. As a result, some jurisdictions receive funding that may not fully cover their SRO needs, while other funds remain unspent statewide because LEAs are not currently permitted to reapply during the same fiscal year.

In other words, even if an LEA exhausts its initial allocation and still has an unmet need for SRO coverage, it has no mechanism to request additional SSF funding. H.B. 76 addresses this gap by authorizing MCSS to open a second round of applications, allowing remaining funds to be used where they are most needed.

This is especially important given the role SROs play in protecting students and school staff. Over the last several decades, Maryland has seen an increase not only in the number of violent incidents occurring in schools, but also in the severity of those incidents. Although the General Assembly unanimously established statewide SRO funding in 2019, these challenges have continued to grow.

Currently, only 19.5% of Maryland public schools have a full-time SRO, a decrease from over 20% in 2023. At a time when school safety concerns are rising, this decline leaves too many schools without adequate coverage.

In addition to their security role, SROs also serve an important community function by building relationships with students and staff, helping prevent future criminal behavior, and supporting students in crisis. They can also play a particularly important role for students with special needs, where familiarity and trust can help prevent escalation and ensure safety for everyone involved. As a father of a special

needs child in Harford County Public Schools, I can personally attest to the value of that relationship and the peace of mind it provides.

I also want to address a common concern: that SROs are primarily focused on arresting students for minor, nonviolent issues such as truancy. Based on my conversations with SROs across the state, arrests are viewed as a last resort, and their primary role is relationship-building, safety support, and de-escalation. Truancy enforcement is not the focus of their work.

Finally, I would note that, at the recommendation of the Department of Budget and Management, we worked closely with MCSS last year on this legislation to ensure the language accurately reflects the bill's intent while respecting the agency's administrative role.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on H.B. 76. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,



Delegate Mike Griffith
District 35A, Cecil and Harford Counties
Vice Chair, Maryland Veterans Caucus, Maryland General Assembly-House of Delegates