

# MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

<b>Bill:</b>	House Bill 326	<b>Date:</b>	April 7, 2026
<b>Title:</b>	Education - MCSS - Anonymous Reporting System	<b>Committee:</b>	Education, Energy & Environment
<b>Position:</b>	Favorable	<b>Contact:</b>	Kimberly Buckheit <a href="mailto:kim.buckheit1@maryland.gov">kim.buckheit1@maryland.gov</a> 443-902-0622

On behalf of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of support for House Bill 326.

Anonymous reporting systems are the single most effective tool for breaking the "code of silence" that precedes nearly all school attacks. Research confirms that school violence is a detectable process that can be interrupted. By removing the fear of retaliation, these systems allow for early intervention in violence, self-harm, and bullying. Enacting HB 326 secures the operation, confidentiality, and statewide consistency of these tools.

Safe Schools Maryland (SSMD) serves as the state's frontline defense, providing a secure reporting platform for over 1,420 public schools and 200 private facilities. Administered by the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS), the system is monitored 24/7/365 by professional staff through the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM). This ensures that every report receives immediate action, regardless of the hour. Enacting HB 326 is essential to codifying this success, ensuring that every Maryland citizen has access to a reliable, professional method for reporting behaviors of concern. SSMD is a specialized tool and does not replace 911 in active emergencies or 988 for immediate suicidal and other mental health crises; rather, it is a system where concerns are shared and triaged by professionals allowing for mitigation of harm and interventions that increase future success.

## The Science of Prevention: Recognizing and Sharing Concerns

Targeted school violence is often preventable because it is rarely a sudden event; it is a behavioral process. Research from the U.S. Secret Service indicates that prior to most incidents, individuals—usually family and friends—recognize warning signs, where an intent to harm is shared via social media, written notes, or verbal threats.<sup>1</sup> Anonymous reporting systems serve as the critical bridge between this knowledge and professional intervention. The results are measurable: administrators report these systems have helped avert potential violence (52%) and suicide crises (73%),<sup>2</sup> while peer-reviewed studies show that schools utilizing an anonymous reporting system experience a 13.5% reduction in violent incidents.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Langman, Peter, Warning Signs: Identifying School Shooters Before They Strike, Langman Psychological Associates, LLC, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Planty, M., Banks, D., Lindquist, C., Cartwright, J., & Witwer, A. (2020). Tip Lines for School Safety: A National Portrait of Tip Line Use. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.

<https://www.rti.org/publication/tip-lines-school-safety-national-portrait-tip-line-use/fulltext.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Hsieh, H. F., et al. (2022). Journal of School Violence, 21(4), 413–428.



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## **Bystanders Become "Upstanders"**

To be effective, reporting systems must overcome the "code of silence" fueled by fear of retaliation or social stigma. By providing a truly anonymous mechanism, we empower people to move from bystanders to "upstanders." This information feeds directly into the Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)<sup>4</sup> process, which is a supportive framework designed to identify behaviors of concern and provide early intervention. Unlike traditional discipline, this process focuses on addressing grievances and risk indicators to support students in distress.

## **Maintaining System Integrity**

While concerns about misuse exist, data indicates that false reporting is rare—typically involving less than 3% of tips—and decreases significantly once proper training occurs.<sup>5</sup> When individuals see that tips are handled with professional discretion and lead to genuine help, the integrity of the system is reinforced. School leaders consistently indicate that the ability to respond effectively to bullying and other safety concerns outweighs the minimal risk of misuse, making anonymous reporting systems an essential tool for maintaining a positive school climate.<sup>6</sup>

## **Preserving Anonymity to Increase Reporting**

Research from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the U.S. Secret Service underscores that anonymity is a critical factor in encouraging bystander reporting; without a guarantee of confidentiality, individuals are significantly less likely to come forward with information regarding potential threats.<sup>7</sup> HB 326 addresses these concerns by explicitly mandating that all records and information related to the system are confidential and exempt from disclosure under the Maryland Public Information Act.

Keeping our schools safe depends on individuals feeling safe enough to stand up and speak up. By codifying anonymous reporting through HB 326, you are not just providing a tip line; you are promoting a culture that empowers people to **'See it, Hear it, and Report it.'**

Thank you again for taking the time to consider the above information, and MCSS respectfully requests that the committee give House Bill 326 a favorable report.

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<sup>4</sup> National Threat Assessment Center, Averting Targeted School Violence, Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools, U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security, (2021).

<https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2021-03/USSS%20Averting%20Targeted%20School%20Violence.2%2021.03.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy L. Espelage et al., "Implementation of Tiplines and Reporting Apps for School Safety: A Qualitative Analysis of Parent and School Personnel Perspectives," *Journal of School Violence* 20 no. 3 (2021): 336-350, and Al Stein-Seroussi et al., "Nevada SafeVoice," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, award number 2016-CK-BX-0007, April 2024, NCJ 308905.

<sup>6</sup> Planty et al., *supra* note 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency & U.S. Secret Service, *Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting: A Toolkit for Strengthening*, Department of Homeland Security, (May 2023).

[https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-05/cisa-usss-k-12-bystander-reporting-toolkit-508\\_final.pdf](https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-05/cisa-usss-k-12-bystander-reporting-toolkit-508_final.pdf)

