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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
SCHOOL SECURITY
DELIVERED MARCH 2, 2018

OPENING REMARKS

Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you members of the Senate Education Committee for inviting me to join you here this morning.

On February 14th, our nation witnessed yet another mass shooting which left 17 innocent students and faculty dead at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. It was the third deadliest shooting at a school or university since 1999, surpassed only by the massacres at Sandy Hook in 2012 and at Virginia Tech in 2007.

I think I speak for all of us when I say the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania grieves the loss of these victims and stands in solidarity with the Parkland, Florida community in the wake of this senseless tragedy.

Understandably, our national discourse has been reignited with respect to the safety and security of our schools. As policymakers, it is our minimum responsibility to take part in this dialogue and, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your willingness to provide a forum for this important conversation to take place today.

To state the obvious, mass murder is a complex and multifaceted societal ill. In the coming weeks and months, there will be a time and place to have meaningful debates about topics ranging from gun laws to mental health. Today, we are here to discuss school building security and my comments will be narrowly tailored to that topic – one which I believe merits serious and extensive reexamination.

Part of the beauty of representative democracy is that it brings together private citizens, each equipped with their own experiences and fields of expertise, to work for the betterment of the community at large. I approach this topic not just as a concerned Pennsylvanian, not just as a father of four, but as someone with extensive training and experience in the topic of building security.

As a former United States Marshal, I have been personally responsible for protecting members of the federal judiciary and foreign diplomats. I was also responsible for security planning and implementation at four federal courthouses across 33 counties in the Middle District of Pennsylvania.

My testimony today is derived from over two decades of personal experience, as well as consultation with former colleagues who are globally-recognized experts in the field of building security. My conversations with these experts revolved around two central questions:

- Is Pennsylvania doing enough to preempt a catastrophic incident like the one we witnessed in Florida?
- Are school administrators and faculty adequately prepared to respond to a bona fide active shooter situation?

The U.S. and state Department of Education and many school districts have taken significant and worthwhile measures to prevent tragedy from striking and to mitigate the loss of life should tragedy strike. Nothing in my testimony today should be construed to diminish the work that has already been done at the federal, state, or local levels, or to question the motives of education officials who may lack specialized training but undoubtedly have the best interest of our students in mind.

But sitting here today, we would be mistaken to assume that the status quo in our state is adequate when it comes to prevention and preparedness. It doesn't take an expert to recognize

that two Pennsylvania students, who might be separated by nothing more than a township line, can find themselves subject to two dramatically different standards of protection. We would be lying to ourselves if we said that each and every Pennsylvania student enjoys the same minimum level of safety and security that we enjoy as Senators in this Capitol building.

Mr. Chairman, my testimony today will consist of two parts.

First, I want to discuss the parameters of what I will call a **Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP)**. Boiled down to its essence, a CSSP should consist of three phases: Assessment, Planning, and Training. The following diagram conceptualizes the CSSP paradigm:



Second, I would like to briefly discuss the broader policy ramifications of implementing CSSP's across each of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts. There will undoubtedly be logistical and financial barriers to accomplishing such an initiative. This is our challenge, but this is also our calling. *If not us, then who? If not now, then when?*

With that said, let me first delve into the topic of Assessment...

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL SAFETY PLAN

Assessment

Mr. Chairman, it is my strongly held conviction that finite school safety resources should not be allocated without a professionally-conducted preliminary needs assessment. Without an objective evaluation of a school's assets and unique needs, the potential exists for taxpayer dollars to be mismanaged or spent with suboptimal efficacy.

A preliminary needs assessment should evaluate:

- Current emergency response policies ("protocol assessment")
- Security hardware and resources ("facility assessment")
- The ability of staff to execute protocols and leverage facilities ("personnel assessment").

It should be determined whether the school effectively utilizes physical access control mechanisms and other technology-based security tactics to protect students. Examples of commonly used safety measures include:

- Singular points of entry and exit ("choke points")
- Hardening points of entry
- Bulletproof doors and windows
- Wireless communication infrastructure
- Video surveillance cameras and closed circuit television systems
- Weapon detection systems (metal detectors, wands)
- Access control systems (electronic key cards and visitor ID software)

The importance of assessing personnel cannot be overlooked. Security cameras, for example, are useless if no one is designated to watch them or trained to identify potential threats. In this instance, security cameras only serve to document a tragedy.

Serious consideration should be given to the party responsible for conducting the preliminary needs assessment. Can we, or *should* we expect, untrained district superintendents to independently make these assessments? Will local law enforcement conduct assessments from the vantage point of a first responder who arrives during or after an incident has already occurred? Later in my testimony I will expound on this issue.

Planning

After a preliminary needs assessment has been completed, a unique safety plan must be developed for the school. This presents one of our major policy hurdles – simply stated, “one-size-fits-all” plans do not work. Customization is the name of the game.

It is equally important to omit unneeded information and disseminate plans that are both concise and germane. We are doing our teachers (and by extension our students) a disservice when we hand them a 250-page generic safety plan that covers every conceivable facet of security and emergency response. One can almost hear the thought process of an overworked teacher – “Why am I reading something published by FEMA...it talks about hurricanes and we’re in Pennsylvania!” “This plan references working with our SRO...we don’t have a SRO...why am I wasting my time with this stuff?”

Let me reiterate...above all else, plans must be custom and relevant.

Every school’s customized campus protection program should align existing security protocols and infrastructure with global best practices, giving careful consideration to the uniqueness of each school. Plans should identify critical locations, vital emergency equipment, and personnel duties at each school. Numerous factors should be considered, including but not limited to:

- Campus size
- Staff size
- Student population
- Geographic location and surrounding terrain
- Proximity to emergency response services (Police, Fire, EMS)
- Historical data
- School culture

Plan developers, along with school administrators and staff members, should compose a guide for implementing, evaluating, and sustaining the program. Goals and objectives, as well as milestone timelines should be established for their individual program.

It’s important to emphasize that confidentiality of school safety plans is crucial. What good is an active shooter protocol if it’s publicly available for any would-be assailant to study before striking? As you may know, Senator Tomlinson and I recently circulated a cosponsor memo for a bill requiring school security and safety matters to be discussed in Executive Session. More than half of the country has already adopted this policy. I hope you’ll consider attaching your name in support of this commonsense initiative.

Training

The third, and arguably the most important phase of a Comprehensive School Safety Plan is training.

To understand the importance of training, one must fully appreciate how humans respond psychologically and physiologically to authentic threats. I can speak from firsthand experience on the effect of “fear-induced stress” and how it is managed through preparation and training. There is extensive academic literature documenting how people’s heart rate and blood pressure increase during stressful events, resulting in clouded judgement and reduced motor skills. Unpreparedness becomes more evident as the seriousness or complexity of the event rises.

People never rise to the occasion, they fall to the level of their training. Robust training acclimates responders to stress. The highest level of individual preparedness is known as “unconscious competence” – that is, effective performance which relies on training and intuition.

To anyone who questions the appropriateness of subjecting educators to rigorous active shooter training, I would respectfully remind them that in the absence of armed security personnel, school staff becomes the student’s de facto security detail.

There is a “response vacuum” that exists between the time a crisis begins and when professional responders can be on the scene. This vacuum may be as short as the time it takes a SRO to get notification and move across campus to intervene. In other cases, the response may be 30 minutes or longer, especially in rural schools without immediate access to law enforcement services. This is not a criticism, but simply an acknowledgement that professional responders cannot be everywhere they are needed in real-time.

If an event is going to begin and end in mere minutes, who else can reasonably intervene besides those in the immediate area where the event is occurring? The ability to function under stress, utilize hardware at their disposal, and deploy established response tactics in real time is of utmost importance.

Initial training curriculum should entail, at minimum:

- Providing school employees with written fundamentals for responding to emergency situations on their specific campus
- Establishing a sequence of response across multiple emergency scenarios
- Conducting scenario-based training exercises on the school campus, allowing staff members to experience the uniqueness of responding in their own environment. This includes the use of role players, and participation of local first responders (law enforcement, fire, EMS)

Even after school systems adequately assess, plan, and train, there must be understanding that there is a shelf life to what they have accomplished. A robust protection program requires incremental modification. Every year, staff people come and go, workspaces and classrooms change, facilities are altered, and the benefits of training fade. Constant and intentional refreshment of all phases should be thought of as the “new normal” on school campuses.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

As I previously mentioned and readily concede, the statewide implementation of unique CSSP's presents both logistical and financial challenges.

From my perspective, some of the first questions we must answer are:

- *Who is responsible for conducting preliminary needs assessments?*
- *Are these the same individuals or entities who will be responsible for the development of unique school safety plans?*
- *Who can we entrust to conduct initial and recurring training?*

I am a firm believer in local control, but the complex nature of this endeavor necessitates professionalized outside involvement and uniformity. On some level, I believe it would be unrealistic and unfair for individuals trained in education to develop and implement CSSP's unilaterally. Collaboration with local school officials will be important, but standardization and quality are paramount.

The last time the Senate Education Committee held a public hearing on school safety was in 2013. In reviewing the testimony, I was particularly interested to learn about the Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Team (RVAT) which operates as an appendage of the Pennsylvania State Police. Perhaps with the appropriate resources the RVAT would be amenable to fulfilling some or all of these requirements. Ideally this expanded role would entail collaboration with local school officials as well.

Instead of requiring principals and district superintendents to assess, plan, and train staff themselves, perhaps a more realistic expectation would be managing, tracking, and documenting compliance with new requirements and mandates related to school safety. To that end, we must determine: *which accountability measures are appropriate and effective for ensuring compliance?*

Public partnerships with private security consultancies is another option, but uniformity and quality control may suffer. The feasibility of over 500 P3's is another downside to such an arrangement. The scope of work demands at least a partially centralized administrative unit.

Furthermore, we need to discuss:

- *What is a reasonable timeline for statewide implementation?*
- *Would incremental adoption of CSSP's make more sense?*
- *Are pilot programs a viable precursor to statewide adoption?*

And of course, the most important question is *"How are we going to pay for all of this?"*

I think it's time to have a serious conversation about reprioritizing existing education expenditures. Consider that the 2017-18 General Fund Budget allocated an all-time record \$12.21 billion to the Department of Education. Roughly \$8.53 million was dedicated to the Safe School Initiative line item. This figure represents less than 1/10th of 1 percent of General Fund spending in Education.

In the wake of the Parkland shooting, with 17 people dead, can we honestly say this figure is commensurate with the level of school security demanded by our new American reality?

At a minimum, I think we should seriously contemplate earmarking any new Basic Education dollars for expanded school safety initiatives, provided that they are consistent with the CSSP framework I've outlined here today.

Perhaps the answer is driving additional investments to PSP to bolster RVAT efforts, while working to establish minimum standards for preliminary assessments, customized school safety plans, and standards for initial and recurring training.

Perhaps the state Department of Education can make us aware of Federal match funding for these types of initiatives. If no such funding exists, maybe it's time to petition Congress to make such funding available.

Earlier in my testimony I touched on the beauty of representative democracy. 253 of us have the privilege of meeting under this dome to discuss and debate policy, to participate in the "marketplace of ideas." At this crossroads, I am reminded of one of President Kennedy's famous quotes. In 1958, JFK encouraged and reminded us

"... not [to] seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future."

We cannot afford continued inaction. The time for proactive policymaking is now. I am so very appreciative for your time, attention, and ongoing consideration of these proposals and many others. Thank you to Chairman Eichelberger and the Committee for your willingness to be part of the solution today. To accept responsibility for our future. I thank you. Your constituents thank you. The people of Pennsylvania thank you.