

**Written Testimony to:**  
**Senate Education and Veteran's Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee**  
**February 13, 2013**  
**Sen. Lisa Baker, Sen. Mike Folmer, Sen. Joe Scarnati**

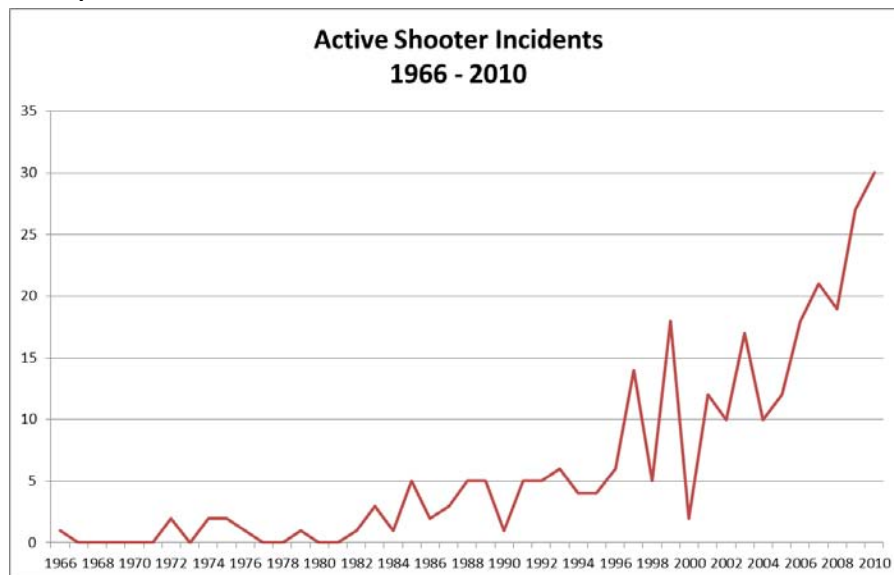
**Presented by:**  
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Senate Chair Lisa Baker and Minority Chair Timothy Solobay, Senate Chair Mike Folmar and Minority Chair Andrew Dinniman and to member of both the Education and Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committees I offer good day, I thank you for the invitation to offer testimony on safe schools, and I strongly commend you all for considering issues that will add safety to the hundreds of thousands of children that attend Pennsylvania schools.

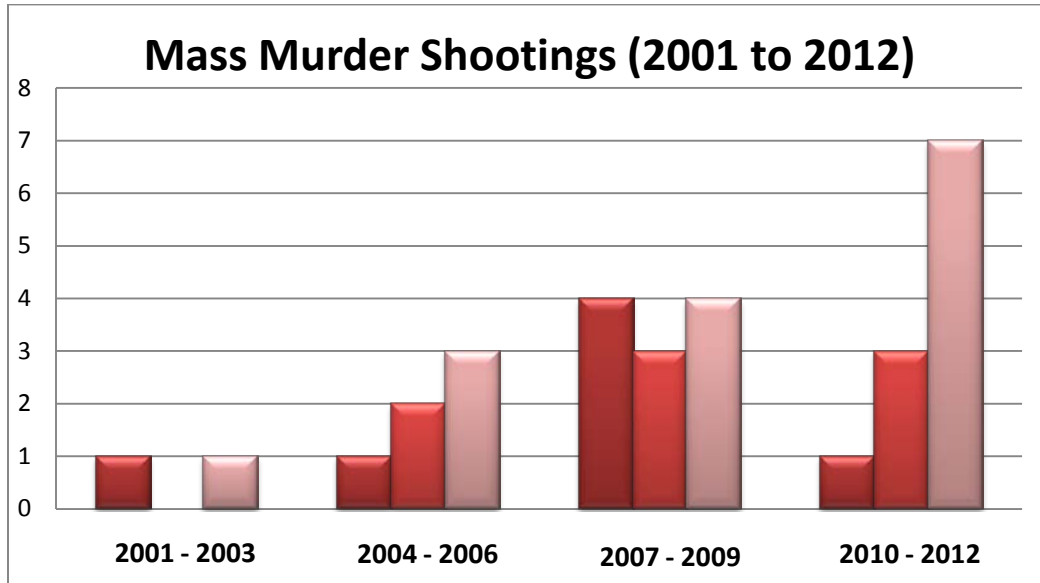
As you all know, my name is John Bruner and I am police officer and the Negotiations Leader of a SWAT Team. I am a former Chief County Detective of the Greene County District Attorney's Office and, since August of 2007, I have lectured and studied the active shooter phenomenon including shootings in our schools. In short, the statistics I have reviewed and have attached to this testimony have shown three things. 1) **Active Shooter Incidents** have increased over the years. 2) **Mass Murders Shootings** have increased over the years. 3) **School Shootings / Discharges** have increased over the years. Although all studies have been attached for your review, I have included reference charts of each to my written testimony.

To thoroughly understand the terms completely the following definition are as follows:

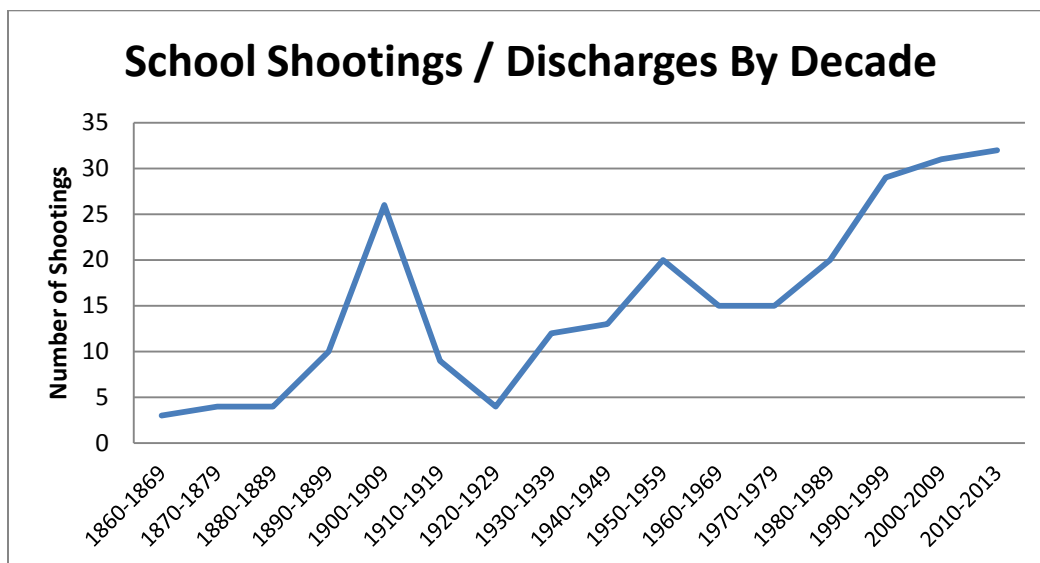
- 1) **Active Shooter:** "An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area." (Department of Homeland Security). This requires a person trying to kill more than one person and there is no death or injury requirement to satisfy the definition. **Study Attached: New York Police Department, 2011**



- 2) **Mass Murder Shooting:** “Four or more murders occurring during a particular event with no cooling-off period between the murders.” (FBI) **Study Attached: Follman, Aronsem and Pan Study, 2012**



- 3) **School Shootings / Discharges:** “Incidents where a firearm was simply discharged at or in a school infrastructure, including incidents of such on a school bus or on school property or when school was in session on campuses of K-12 public schools and private schools, as well as colleges and universities.” These discharges shall include shootings, suicides, homicides, accidental gun discharges, mass shootings, active shootings, etc. **Study Attached: Sourced Wikipedia, 2013**



Please understand that the recommendations I make here today are based on the statistics of these 3 studies. I wish to now stress that these statistics have increased every decade and show absolutely no signs of holding steady or decreasing and, therefore, I believe it is only responsible for us all to speculate that they will continue to increase in the future at the current rate of increase already observed. That being said, this very moment is the time to have a sense of urgency and to be very proactive in researching ways to make our school children safer. I was asked to come here today prepared to address the Top 3 changes to make school safer:

## **1) Form County Safe School Coalitions**

I would recommend that all 67 Pennsylvania counties form a safe school organized coalition that would meet every 3 months and discuss all aspects of student safety. Everything from risk and vulnerability assessments, creating a proper crisis response plan, mock drills, school bus vulnerability concerns, new safety products on the market, etc., can be discussed and explored.

(I have attached the Schuylkill County Schools Readiness & Emergency Management Planning Consortium and the **Schuylkill County Safe School Coalition** model for proper example.)

**Interoperability:** Participation at these meetings would include all school district superintendents, non-public school leaders, IU school leaders, school solicitors, school resource officers (SRO) or other school police enforcement, school district transportation directors, police, county district attorney, county fire chiefs, certified Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Team RVAT member (school inspector), county emergency management, county and state SWAT leadership personnel, 911 dispatch supervisors, hospital personnel, ambulance service director(s), American Red Cross, NASRO (North America School Resource Officer) member, county commissioner(s), elected local legislators, senators, and US Congress or designee to get everyone on the same page.

**School Risk & Vulnerability Assessment Training:** Also under this first recommendation, I would suggest training additional school police officers, SRO's, municipal police officers or additional Pa State Police Troopers as Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Team (RVAT) members under the current Pa State Police Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. The goal here is to have police from each Pennsylvania county RVAT trained so to ensure uniformity to each county school within their county and to ensure all RVAT members can attend coalition meetings to address assessment concerns in their county.

**State Level Leadership:** Under this recommendation, to oversee the 67 counties, I would suggest the Commonwealth consider creating the **Pennsylvania Department of Safe School Coalition**. This department can liaison between PEMA, senate committees, the 67 newly formed Pennsylvania county safe school coalitions, the Pa District Attorney's Association, and the Attorney General's Office to ensure all counties receive similar and controlled content, up-to-date laws and legal decisions, the sharing of grant opportunities, training opportunities, etc., to ensure all counties are equally informed.

**Increase General Police Presence:** Under this recommendation, I would ask the Commonwealth to urge the Fraternal Order of Police, the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association, the Pa State Police, the Municipal Police Officers Education and Training Commission (MPOETC), and the Pa Sheriff's Association to have all patrol units, during their patrol rounds, increase their police presence in or around all schools, near school bus stops, and behind bus routes when time can allow.

## **2) Additional School Resource Officers (SRO) or School Police Officers in every building.**

I would recommend the placing at every school building an armed and certified trained School Resource Officer (SRO) or Police Officer in full uniform (including tactical vest, handcuffs, less lethal force option(s)) with **immediate** and direct radio communication to 911 and surrounding police agencies during regular school hours and at all major school functions. Researching the many workplace shootings, which includes school shootings, reveals that an armed police officer has successfully intervened by using reasonable and lethal force during some active shooting incidents thus preventing additional death and injury. As well, with direct radio communication, this officer can summons emergency first responders **immediately** and give up-to-date changes to responding police departments **immediately** and give 911 information about the injured **immediately**...Where responding police units need to park...where ambulances are needed to go...where an inner perimeter needs to be formed requesting a medical helicopter...what roads need to be shut down...all this can be performed by this police officer **immediately** without a second lost.

As we all know, every second saved can save a life. During a shooting, this police officer or SRO would satisfy **NIMS** (National Incident Management System) requirement **and FEMA protocol** as the **“Incident Commander”** until other departments and agencies arrive at the scene to relieve him of that duty as they all work together under NIMS protocol to form a **“Unified Command”** structure. Please understand that substituting these police officers with armed security guards or armed teachers or armed administrators would not satisfy all the benefits that I have described above.

As a police officer and SWAT member who has responded to workplace homicide and other crisis situations where gunfire and death have unfolded, and who has attended mock school shootings, there is no substitute and no better tactical advantage for our children than having an experienced and battle-tested police officer at that scene to address the threat and to command the situation. We need a trained police officer who can be trusted and relied upon to properly react and direct others under high-stress and an officer who has received properly trained muscle memory response that is paramount and comes with these crisis situations when the body is going through the neurological “Fight or Flight” response. In my experience and training, other than a tsunami or other hi-level natural disaster, I cannot think of a more stressful situation than an active school shooter. We must meet this level of intense stress with the proper tool...an armed and trained police officer.

I interviewed the Vice President of the Pennsylvania Chapter of NASRO and School Police Officer of the Keystone Oaks School District (Allegheny County) Aaron Vanatta. It is Mr. Vanatta’s belief that having a SRO or police officer inside every school building and interacting with the children over the years will build a positive rapport and trust with the students starting at a young age. It is this valuable rapport and trust over the years that may result in a student informing the SRO or police officer that another student has brought a gun into a school thus preventing a tragedy. According to NASRO’s James Bernard, Professor of Law, Pepperdine University School of Law, “Since January 1, 2013, there have been 48 incidents where guns have been discovered on students, in their bags, or in their lockers. That works out to more than two gun reports a day this school year.”

Researching the many shootings, I have found that it is not uncommon for the shooter to directly or indirectly communicate their intentions to others through “Leakage” or “Legacy Token” or when recruiting others to participate thus only adding credibility to Vanatta’s theory that these can be foiled at times.

#### **ARMED POLICE – ARMED SECURITY – ARMED ADMINISTRATORS – ARMED TEACHERS**

This report would be incomplete without the mentioning of arming teachers. With an open mind, I took a good faith review of the tactical advantages and disadvantages of arming different individuals within our schools to face

an armed gunman during a school shooting incident. The below chart is based on likelihoods through training and experiences each person most likely would possess.

### **ARMED POLICE – ARMED SECURITY – ARMED ADMINISTRATOR – ARMED TEACHER**

	<b>Armed Police</b>	<b>Armed Security</b>	<b>Armed Administrator</b>	<b>Armed Teacher</b>	<b>ADVANTAGE</b>
<b>Prior Hi-Stress Experiences</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Direct Radio to 911 and Police</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Arrest Powers</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Has more Weapons Retention Experience</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Likely to Wear ballistic vest</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Police Academy Trained &amp; Less Lethal Trained.</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Must abandon their classroom &amp; their students during a shooting</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>POLICE SECURITY ADMINISTRATOR</b>
<b>Understands FEMA, NIMS, ALICE, &amp; SRO</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Has more Court Room Experience</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>POLICE</b>
<b>Can focus 100% on Security</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>POLICE SECURITY</b>
<b>Turnover Rate (Build trust with students)</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>More</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>POLICE ADMINISTRATION TEACHER</b>

I have reviewed different states that have submitting bills to arming teachers and, in the case of Texas (HB 1002), they are not focused on first placing armed police in their buildings. I believe we here in Pennsylvania should be

very different and show we want the highest trained people with the best available tools to protect our children...a uniformed police officer.

As well, I have reviewed house bills that including having a gun locked inside a safe or inside a locked box in the school to be used by a teacher or administrator during a school shooting.

Without hesitation, that this measure will not work properly and within immediacy if the intended teacher is far away when the shooting starts. If the gunman shoots this teacher before the teacher can get to this locked gun makes this idea worthless. Secondly, this gun is at risk of being stolen and raises many weapon retention problems after the gun is removed from the box. And lastly, during fight or flight, trying to find keys to unlock this safe or trying to remember the combination to the safe when gunfire and screams are being heard in the very next room makes this idea very unlikely to succeed.

Simply put, we would be placing our children at risk if we are quick to assume that putting a gun in the hands of a teacher is the quick solution to a very aggressive problem should a gunman enter the school and start shooting. Relying on teachers who do not the proper training to quickly resolve these types of situations is a gamble. I believe this chart is very compelling that arming a SRO or school police officer is the obvious best choice in deciding whom to arm to protect our children in our school's buildings. Let's start here first and work hard to find creative ways to obtain funding and work hard to re-evaluate school budgets to fulfill this society's greatest priority...protecting our children. I cannot think of one parent or one taxpayer who would be upset with a school board's decision to completely re-examine and completely re-organize the entire school board's budget by placing child safety at the absolute top. And I would respectfully ask this government to offer financial assistance to assist these school districts in their quest.

### **3) Mental Health**

Every criminal act or every act committed by the mentally insane starts with the brain. Due to the fact that anger, retaliation, and revenge are often cited as to why a student shoots up a school, we must focus hard on this mental aspect. My third suggestion is to consult with professionals in the mental health and pediatrics communities and explore yearly non-intrusive mental health checkups by the appropriate personnel. If we talk and keep a constant ear on our students and quickly discover changes in their behavior we may be able to investigate and uncover a severe victim of bullying or that a student has started bullying others and offer help. And further, students should be educated on general stress, stress coping mechanisms, and anti-bullying on a continuance basis as research has shown that people snap when their abilities to cope with stress become overwhelmed.

**Conclusion:** I hope I have showed that active shooters are on the rise and we now need proper tools to address this problem. These ideas that I have provided today will not only help the little Maggie's and little Ryan's that are currently romping around schools in Washington County on the western side of this state but will also help the little Jack's and the precious little Avery's that will one day be entering schools all the way on the other side of this state. So whether you are a Steeler's fan or an Eagle's fan, folks, we can all agree that right here in Pennsylvania, we do what is right when protecting our children.

Respectfully submitted,

*John Bruner*

Source:

- 1) Mass murder Statistics:

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/07/mass-shootings-map>

- 2) Active Shooter Statistics:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/counterterrorism/ActiveShooter2012Edition.pdf>

- 3) School Shootings / Discharges:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_school\\_shootings\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_school_shootings_in_the_United_States)

- 4) Schuylkill County Safe School Coalition

<http://www.iu29.org/REMS/SafeSchools/>

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