

Good Morning Senators and Distinguished Guests,

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on the extremely important safety and security issues facing school violence.

I am Sheriff Philip Bueki of Pike County, Pennsylvania. I have over 25 years of first hand experience working with school districts in this Commonwealth as both a D.A.R.E. Officer and School Resource Officer. My certifications include: Act 120 Municipal Police Officers' Academy, Act 2 Deputy Sheriffs' Academy, and Nationally certified D.A.R.E. Mentor and School Resource Officer academy. I also had the privilege of serving on the state training team through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency that certified school based law enforcement officers. These officers provide drug/violence prevention programs.

With the complex issues facing the safety of our schools and our children, I believe we need to have the most professional and well-trained officers to accomplish this task. These officers also must be provided and utilize the most current equipment such as Class 3 holsters and duty gear. This will ensure proper weapon retention and safety for both the officers and the school.

The Pennsylvania Public School Code Title 24 PS subsection 7-778 "School police officers" already defines the training as required under 53 PA. C.S. Ch. 21 subchapter D relating to municipal police education and training. Any school district which employs a school police officer under this section shall report annually to the Department of Education, Office of Safe Schools, the following information regarding school police officers. Every school police officer that has been granted powers under this subsection or who has been authorized to carry a firearm must, before entering the duties of his office, successfully complete the training as set forth in 53 PA. C.S. Ch. 21 subchapter D.

I believe we already have a good system in place with this act to hire only professional officers who have received the proper training. This act, also in my opinion, needs to expand the ability of these officers to recertify yearly under Act 120 of the Municipal Police Officers' Training Act. This will ensure current and up to date education and certification that is required for every police officer in this Commonwealth. At this

time, a school police officer cannot recertify yearly under this act. For the safety of everyone involved, especially in a school environment, we need to have only the best-trained and certified individual when it comes to carrying a weapon into our schools. With over 500 school districts in Pennsylvania with each district having multiple schools, this will allow the school district to hire its own school police. Here in North Eastern Pennsylvania, due to the large increase of population and the safety issues facing our schools, the Delaware Valley and East Stroudsburg School Districts have already instituted school police officers. These officers interact with the students and school staff on a daily basis and are invaluable to the school district.

Next I would like to address the on going effort of educating our children on the topics of bullying and violence prevention. There are many programs being taught across this Commonwealth that are very effective in combatting violence in our schools. Out of all the lessons covered in the curriculum, the students' feedback was overwhelmingly positive for the importance of anti-bullying and violence issues. The surprising facts are that many elementary children are already facing cyber bullying and computer related violence. The children really enjoyed learning how to handle and report these problems appropriately. I believe this education needs to start at the elementary level and to continue into the middle and high school years. This is important due to the increased peer pressure faced during teenage years. As a D.A.R.E. officer, I believe helping our children to identify and discuss the problems facing violence and bullying issues remains an important part of education.

Lastly, as Sheriff of my county, I have been involved in several training exercises pertaining to school threats. These exercises involved many emergency service organizations including police, fire, and rescue. I have been involved in adopting emergency plans with many school districts within my county. I believe we can continue to improve these training exercises by working together and standardizing training for all those involved. The reality of an active shooter and school emergency will rely upon the immediate responding agencies. In many areas of this Commonwealth, this includes State Police, Municipal Police, Deputy Sheriffs, etc. We have learned through tragic events that time is of the utmost importance when responding to and securing the threat. The

first responding officers will be responsible to accomplish this task. Training on active shooter response has been provided to officers through state required update training. I believe we need to standardize the content of this training so that all emergency responders are trained equally. This is important because many different officers from different departments will be arriving on the scene at the same time. Pennsylvania Sheriffs and their deputies are well trained and offer many community based programs to their communities. There has been a public out-cry to safe guard our schools since the tragedy in Newtown. Many sheriffs are currently providing deputy patrols to school districts within their counties. They are also meeting with school officials and discussing safety concerns within the school parking lots and school grounds. Several sheriffs have started programs called, "Deputy Park and Walk". This includes walk throughs during the school day to interact with school staff and children. We coordinate our work with other law enforcement agencies to provide the most effective coverage possible. As law enforcement officers, we need to unite and work together. Sheriffs are ready to stand and assist in any way necessary to protect the health and safety of others.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss these topics related to making our schools a safer place. It has been a privilege to share my expertise and views with this panel. I will assist you and the citizens of this Commonwealth in any possible way.

Sheriff Philip Bueki
Past President Pennsylvania Sheriffs' Association