

May 9, 2024

The Honorable Joseph McNamara
Chair, House Education Committee
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Representative McNamara,

Thank you for your tireless efforts and leadership as co-chair of the Special Legislative Study Commission to Evaluate and Provide Recommendations on Mandated Safety Protocols for Rhode Island Schools. Thank you also for your work as Chair of the House Education Committee.

It has come to the attention of the undersigned members of the Commission that there is a bill being proposed as a result of the Commission's work, that is not reflective of the conversations and expert witness testimony that was heard in the months that we met and debated best practices on school safety.

The purpose of this letter is to highlight aspects of the bill entitled "The School Emergency Drills Act" that we are in disagreement with in hopes of crafting legislation that mirrors the testimony of the members of the commission.

The following is a list of areas of the proposed bill that are problematic:

1. Page 2 Lines 22-27: This section is mandating numerous training sessions for faculty and staff at different touch points in the school year. While yearly training is important, there is a cost to the training on multiple levels, thus making portions of this bill another unfunded mandate for schools and districts.
2. Page 3: Lines 31 and 31: There is no "RI State Police Basic School Safety Committee. This is referenced in various places throughout the bill.
3. Page 4: Lines 16-19: This section again engages law enforcement to "certify" that CRD training was conducted and to notify the school of any deficiencies. For districts that are small, or those without an SRO, this becomes a logistical and financial strain for districts and law enforcement agencies.
4. Page 5: Lines 22-32. The commission never discussed any portion of this language and it needs to be omitted.
5. Page 5 Lines 33-34 and Page 6 Lines 1 & 2: The commission never discussed this and the wording violates existing RIGL on keeping school district crisis response and safety plans away from APRA requests. This language puts schools and children at risk and must be removed.

6. Page 5 Lines 2-16: This was discussed in committee. However, the opinion was that students should not be allowed to be exempt from any safety drills and that alternate drills could be performed. This section would allow an administrator to exempt any student thereby placing a serious degree of liability on said school administrator. This language needs to be reworked to be more reflective of the conversations in committee.

We thank you for your time and consideration in reading our various concerns with the language in the proposed "School Emergency Drills Act". Please feel free to reach out to any of us if we can be of further assistance to the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lawrence P. Filippelli
Superintendent, Lincoln Public Schools
Vice President RI School Superintendents Assoc.
RI School Safety Committee

Chief Scott Kettelle
Fire Chief, North Kingstown, RI
President, RI Fire Chiefs Association

Mr. Andy Andrade
Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Rhode Island Department of Education
RI School Safety Committee

Mr. Michael Hassell
Principal, Scituate High School
President, RI Association of School
Principals

Members of The Rhode Island School Safety Committee