

From: Amy Herlihy, Barrington, RI

Re:Special Legislative Study Commission to evaluate and provide recommendations on mandated safety protocols for Rhode Island schools

My name is Amy Herlihy and I live in Representative Boylan's district. I am a Speech-Language Pathologist for the Pawtucket School Department. During my time working in the school setting lock down drills and evacuation drills have been added to the school requirement of fire drills.

Each year the schools that I have worked in complete 10 fire drills. Sometimes the fire drills take place throughout the year. When this is the case, it is hard to understand the benefit of requiring hundreds of children to stand outside in the freezing cold without coats on for 10 minutes or more. Sometimes the fire drills all take place within the span of a few weeks. Either way, these fire drills take up a lot of precious time and can cause a lot of anxiety in the children. For example, last year I worked with a girl who worried about a lot of things, including fire drills. She would often ask me, "are we going to have a fire drill today?" And this year, when she saw me in the hall, she asked "do you remember when you helped us with the fire drill?" I wished she remembered something fun that we did!

Lock down drills are another safety drill that I've seen cause fear and worry in children. One of the first lock down drills I participated in was when I was treating a group of kids with the Occupational Therapist (OT). The kids cried a little during the drill but were seemingly able to move forward and complete their work. The next time the OT and myself tried to bring the kids to her room for another treatment session, though, the kids cried as they recalled the lock down drill and said they didn't want to go into the room. They asked if there would be another lock down drill and if a bad guy (this is how staff were told to explain the drills- we're practicing for if a "bad guy" came into school) be coming into school? It took a few weeks before the kids felt really comfortable with going into the treatment room again. In

my current position, I work with preschoolers. It feels very confusing to the staff to practice hiding in school when we have been partially trained in ALICE and know that attempting to hide is not the best way to save anyone's life. And, as you can imagine, it's hard for 4 year olds to understand why we're hiding at school and there are often tears during and after the lockdowns.

As I mentioned, I have been partially trained in ALICE. If you've never attended an ALICE training, it requires viewing pictures of mass shooters, seeing victims of mass shootings and most traumatizing, watching and hearing footage from horribly tragic mass shootings and other camera footage of shootings. Prior to this training, there were no trauma informed statements to warn us of what we would be subject to. There was no option that I was aware of for survivors of gun violence or other trauma to not attend this training. I was shocked and horrified with what we were being made to watch and listen to. When footage of shootings were shown I closed my eyes or went to the bathroom, for a long time. All I could think of was, is traumatizing school staff really necessary to keep kids safe?