



Written Testimony

of

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Regarding

School Security

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Chairman Donovan, Ranking Member Payne, and Members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to improve school security and preparedness, in coordination with interagency partners.

School Security

The Department of Homeland Security's mission states "with honor and integrity, we will safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values." The most important part of our mission is safeguarding the American people, which we do through a variety of means. The DHS National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD) is the nation's risk manager for securing cyberspace and physical infrastructure. Through the implementation of our mission, we have developed deep expertise and extensive capabilities around security that can be leveraged by schools across the country.

NPPD has been working with our partners in the public and private sectors for many years to defend against threats to crowded public venues. We have seen attacks on civilians, in the U.S. and abroad, as they go about their lives and participate in the offerings of a free and democratic civil society. Attacks arrive while attending services at houses of worship, enjoying a concert, or even going out for a stroll on a public path. In America, we expect—and deserve—to continue these normal activities free from harm.

Similarly, our youth deserve an education in a facility where they are free from harm. Yet, in recent years, our nation has witnessed and mourned the deaths of, and injuries to, dozens of students and teachers in our schools. Unfortunately, in this calendar year, two mass shootings in Parkland, Florida and Santa Fe, Texas once again reminded us that we must do more to protect our students. DHS is using our experience working with critical infrastructure owners and operators to secure facilities around the country to better secure our schools. Our work with industry partners to secure the nation's critical infrastructure—through activities such as the development of security standards for Federal buildings, the regulation of security at high-risk chemical facilities, and the conduct of literally thousands of risk assessments at critical infrastructure—has endowed us with the know-how to elevate the overall level of security in the nation. We are also leveraging our experience in supporting a unified federal response to incidents to better support community-level response when our prevention efforts falter. While DHS does not, and should not, provide direct security to schools, we do support those organizations whose direct mission it is to work with schools.

We readily share our tools and knowledge with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, the law enforcement community and others who are directly connected to the nation's more than 130,000 kindergarten through high schools (K-12).¹ This sharing is accomplished through our growing regional presence that supports a nationwide network of our Protective Security Advisors, as well as other DHS resources and programs.

Working Together for More Secure Schools

¹ U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, *2015 Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 105.50 (2016).

The Department is proud to be part of the Federal Commission on School Safety, which is charged with providing meaningful and actionable recommendations and best practices to keep students safe at school. The Commission, which is chaired by U.S. Department of Education Secretary DeVos, also includes Department of Homeland Security Secretary Nielsen, Attorney General Sessions, and Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Azar.

To help further the goals of this commission, DHS is focusing on seven lines of effort:

- Promoting a public awareness campaign modeled on the “See Something, Say Something®” program to encourage awareness and reporting of suspicious activity;
- Creating and sharing a guide on best practices for school-based threat assessments and violence prevention;
- Updating and disseminating guidance on best practices for school building security;
- Integrating and coordinating Federal resources focused on prevention and mitigation of active shooter incidents at schools;
- Providing active shooter training for law enforcement officers;
- Assisting in the development and implementation of tabletop exercises and workshops focused on security protocols, notifications and alerts, response, and recovery capabilities with schools and first responders; and
- Establishing and sharing guidelines and training on tactical emergency casualty care.

Understanding the Issues

The issue of mass shootings at schools is complex and multi-layered, to include understanding behavioral issues as well as security of facilities. The Commission is gathering information from a range of experts. These include students, parents, teachers, school safety personnel, administrators, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, school counselors, security professionals, and others. Each member of the Commission has or will organize at least one meeting focused on some of their respective lines of effort.

At past Commission meetings, we have discussed several of the factors that may contribute to violence, including: cyberbullying and social media; youth consumption of violent entertainment; and effects of press coverage on mass shootings. We have also reviewed past reports and recommendations from experts following previous school shootings, including Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook. DHS is planning a Commission meeting for mid-August where experts in school security best practices, threat assessment, and active shooter mitigation will share their insights and experiences with the Commission.

Recognizing and Learning From Effective Solutions

While the overall issue of school security remains complex, our efforts to learn from past experiences are yielding results.

The Commission conducted a field visit to Hebron-Harman Elementary School in Hanover, Maryland, to learn more about Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a framework for assisting school personnel in organizing evidence-based interventions to help improve academic performance and social behavior outcomes for students.

Three more field visits will take place over the next couple of months, including one led by the Department currently being scheduled in late August, which will focus on physical security for school buildings.

The Commission has also hosted two Listening Sessions, the first taking place at the U.S. Department of Education in DC, and the second in Lexington, KY. Members of Congress, state and local officials, law enforcement, parents, teachers, and students have taken this opportunity to provide input towards the Commission's work. Individuals may also provide input directly to the Department of Education, as outlined in the Federal Register.

Raising the Baseline of School Security

As the Department contributes to the work of the Commission, we are leveraging current programs that cut across the spectrum to boost school security. This work falls within three lines of effort: Education and Community Awareness; Building Capacity through Training and Exercises; and Increasing Early Warning to Identify and Report Potential Threats.

The work performed in support of these lines of effort take into account five planning assumptions:

- Enhanced school security can deter future attacks and disrupt them prior to mass damage being done;
- School security should be designed to minimize disruption to the learning environment;
- Investments in school security will be constrained by limited budgets;
- School security is a shared responsibility and benefits from community involvement, empowering individuals, and leveraging law enforcement, non-governmental, and private sector capability; and
- The Department's mission is to support enhanced school security in the face of potential threats and vulnerabilities, but DHS does not directly secure schools.

Since the attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February 2018, the Department has also conducted over 200 engagements with state and local representatives including schools, state committees, state school security forums, and school districts. DHS supported the Dallas Independent School District and the International Association of Venue Managers with a community outreach program – “SEE, SAY, DO” – to provide Dallas schools with the tools,

training, and resources to prevent an active shooter incident through increased situational awareness.

Another example of DHS work in this area includes the Department's support of the State of Arizona's fusion center, which has partnered with the Phoenix Police Department's Threat Mitigation Unit and other Federal agencies on the development of a Community Liaison Program, which is responsible for maintaining strong working relationships with private-sector partners. The Community Liaison Program is now working with school districts to provide active-shooter training and to foster open lines of communication between schools and the public safety community. DHS has also participated in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission meeting, which is part of an effort to analyze information from the school shooting and other mass violence incidents in the state and address recommendations and system improvements.

Recognizing that most of the Nation's school administrators and educators are not experts in security, DHS is committed to utilizing our expertise to facilitate solutions. This means leveraging the capabilities of industry, school administrators, state and local officials, and our field personnel to ensure that the K-12 community has the tools and resources they need to make the best-informed security decisions.

In closing, I want to underscore the importance of the role that every one of us plays in securing the Nation's schools. A multi-faceted problem like this requires the skills, expertise, knowledge—and action—of a wide and diverse community of interest. School safety must remain a continuing high priority for the nation.

I believe the Department is well-positioned to assist in raising the base-line of security for K-12 schools, together with our partners at all levels of government, in academia, and in communities and law enforcement around the nation. I look forward to working with this Committee to chart a path that will move schools toward enhancing approaches for managing risks from violence in the education environment. I thank you in advance for your continuing leadership in this regard and I look forward to your questions.