

Legislative UPDATE By Lori Fayhee

In the aftermath of the tragic school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Broward County, Florida, several significant issues are now pending this Legislative Session, including, legislation to address student safety and school security. Governor Scott, the Senate, and the House have all recommended legislation on student safety and school security. At the time of this printing, three bills that appear to be the joint effort of the Senate and House have been filed to address these issues: SB 7022 relating to Firearm Safety, SB 7024 relating to Public Records with regard to Victim of a Crime of Mass Violence, and SB 7026 relating to School Safety.

Proposed Safety & Security Measures

Governor Scott proposes, mandatory School Resource Officers (SRO) in every public school or 1 resource officer per 1000 students, that must be sworn sheriff's deputies or police officers with staffing level to be set by sheriff's office. Authorize sheriffs' departments to train additional school personnel or reserve law enforcement officers students, if requested by the local school board. Increase Safe Schools allocation and authorize funds to be used for school safety needs, including hardening measures like metal detectors, bulletproof glass, steel doors, etc. Require each school district that receives a Safe Schools Allocation to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the local sheriff's office, DJJ, DCF, FDLE, and community behavioral health providers for sharing information to coordinate services for prevention/ intervention services and strategies. Require each school to have a threat assessment team consisting of a teacher, a local law enforcement officer, a human resource officer, a DCF employee, DJJ employee, and the principal, to meet monthly to review any potential threats. Establish a new, anonymous K-12 "See Something, Say Something" statewide, with a dedicated hotline, website, and mobile app. Require crisis intervention training for all school personnel, which must be completed before the 2018 school start. Implement mandatory active shooter training for faculty and students. School districts must use all capital outlay funds received from taxpayers for school hardening before it can be spent on any other capital outlay projects. Establish funding to require access to dedicated mental health counselors to provide direct counseling services to students at every school; with the stipulation that these counselors cannot serve dual roles, such as teaching or academic advising. Expand mental health service teams statewide to serve youth and young adults with early or serious mental illness. Require all individuals to be 21 or older to purchase firearms, with exemptions for military and law enforcement. Ban purchase or sale of bump stocks. Restrict gun purchase and possession for mentally ill individuals under the Baker Act. Create the "Violent Threat Restraining Order" which will allow a court to prohibit a violent or mentally ill person from purchasing or possessing a firearm under certain conditions. Prohibit a person from possessing or purchasing a firearm if they are subject to an injunction for protection against stalking or acts of violence. Establish enhanced criminal penalties for threats to schools, such as social media threats of shootings or bombings. Governor Scott's proposed funding would be \$500 million, with \$450 million for school resource officers and \$50 million for mental health services.

The House and Senate propose to improve school security capabilities through additional school resource and security officers, including a "marshal" program to enhance safety and security in schools through the use of law enforcement trained and screened school personnel who function as part of school security teams. Increase Safe Schools allocation and establish safe school and security standards. Review school safety and security plans. Codify and enhance the activities of the multiagency network for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Implement a school safety specialist training program, and update risk assessment procedures. Require each school district to designate a school safety specialist and each school to establish a threat assessment team to provide a coordinated approach to evaluating and responding to students who pose a threat of violence. Require emergency drills for active shooter and hostage situations involving students, school personnel, and law enforcement experts. Review prior incidents and establishes Commission on School Safety & Security within FDLE to investigate system failures in the Parkland shooting and prior incident. Increase funding for mental health training, screening, counseling, and services in schools. Remove barriers preventing school district and law enforcement authorities from referring students appropriately to mental health services or law enforcement. Require all individuals to be 21 or older to purchase firearms, with exemptions for military and law enforcement. Ban purchase or sale of bump stocks. Restrict gun purchase and possession for mentally ill individuals under the Baker Act. A three-day waiting period for all gun purchases to allow for "cooling off period and sufficient time for a more thorough background check. The House and Senate proposed funding is not specified, but the total is expected to be in excess of \$400 million.

Currently, the funds in Specific Appropriation 81 is \$64,456,019 provided for Safe Schools activities and is allocated as follows: \$62,660 is distributed to each district, and the remaining balance is allocated as follows: two-thirds based on the latest official Florida Crime Index provided by the Department of Law Enforcement and one-third based on each district's share of the state's total un-weighted student enrollment.

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Lee County School District (LCSD) has 93,167 students enrolled in 120 schools, which includes 24 charter schools. According to the Florida Department of Education, Lee County employs 151 Guidance Counselors, 38 Social Workers, and 26 School Psychologists to serve these students. Many of the school mental health professionals have dual roles as school testing facilitators. In Lee County School District, the ratio of students to mental health providers is roughly 465 students to one mental health provider. These School Mental Health Professionals, Guidance Counselors, Social Workers, and Psychologists are not funded through Safe Schools.

Lee County School District, in partnership with the Lee County Sheriff's Office, employs 47 School Resource Officers (SRO), one detective, and one supervisor to protect 120 schools. While some schools have a dedicated SRO, many schools have 'rover' SROs, who rotate between schools. Lee County School District's cost for this service is \$1.4 million, and the District received \$989,000 from the state of Florida to cover this expense under Safe Schools this year.

Update on the half-penny sales tax referendum: Due to the passing of HB 317, which provides that a referendum to adopt or amend a local discretionary sales surtax must be held at a general election, the Lee County School Board agreed to place the half-penny sales tax referendum on the general election ballot this fall.