

School Safety Committee

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November 2019

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Committee Charge

The School Safety Committee was created pursuant to Section 2-3-303 (3)(c), C.R.S., which allows the Executive Committee of the Legislative Council to create an interim committee by resolution after the conclusion of the legislative session. The committee is required to:

- review existing statutes relating to school safety, emergency response planning, and the prevention of threats to the safety of students, teachers, administrators, employees, and volunteers who are present on the grounds of each public and private school in the state; and
- study and evaluate programs and methods for identifying and monitoring students in crisis.

Committee Activities

The committee met four times during the 2019 interim and heard from a variety of groups on topics related to school safety, including existing law, programs and departments currently addressing school safety, school security, mental health services for juveniles, the Safe2Tell program, violence prevention, and education and advocacy efforts. The committee also received a presentation on a recent state audit on school safety.

Existing law and other requested research. Legislative Council Staff presented to the committee about existing Colorado law on school safety and how the law has changed since the Columbine High School incident in 1999. Staff also discussed the issue of relative safety in schools and touched on gun violence and rates and accidental firearms deaths among youth in Colorado. The committee also heard how other states have addressed mental health in the context of school safety. Finally, the committee was introduced to the public comment portal that was developed as a way to gain input from members of the public.

Programs and departments addressing school safety in Colorado. Representatives of the School Safety Resource Center in the Department of Public Safety, the Mental Health Promotion Branch in the Department of Public Health and Environment (DPHE), the Department of Education (CDE), and the Office of Behavioral Health in the Department of Human Service (DHS) spoke about existing programs in the state that address issues related to school safety. The committee also heard a presentation from the Office of the State Auditor on the September 2019 School Safety Performance Audit. As a result of these presentations, the committee drafted Bill E, which creates the Colorado Interagency Working Group on School Safety in the Colorado Department of Education.

Behavioral health services for juveniles. A number of groups, including the Colorado Children's Campaign, DPHE, DHS, CDE, Mental Health Colorado, and others, spoke to the committee about the importance of mental health services for youth in schools. They highlighted the need for more social workers or other behavioral health professionals to be placed in schools. These discussions resulted

in the committee drafting Bill A, which requires school district attendance policies to allow for excused absences for behavioral health concerns; Bill B, which convenes a working group to examine behavioral health treatment for children and youth with severe behavioral or mental health disorders, and Bill C; which creates a behavioral health train-the-trainer program for employees of local education providers.

Safe2Tell. The Safe2Tell program, which is housed in the Department of Law, provides students, parents, and community members a safe way to report information about any issues that concern their safety or the safety of others. Representatives from Safe2Tell briefed the committee about the program, including information about how it works and metrics for determining its success. Following the presentation, the committee requested Bill D, which enhances the Safe2Tell program in a number of ways.

Education and advocacy. Several groups that provide educational materials and opportunities surrounding school safety presented to the committee. Representatives from the University of Colorado Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence discussed various areas of study related to school safety. The I Love U Guys Foundation, started by the parents of a victim of school violence, offers programs, at no cost, to schools, districts, departments, agencies and organizations. The committee requested Resolution A, which expresses support for the work of the I Love U Guys Foundation.

Committee Recommendations

As a result of committee discussion and deliberation, the School Safety Committee recommends the following five bills and one resolution for consideration in the 2020 legislative session.

Bill A – Excused Absences in Public School for Behavioral Health. Bill A requires school district attendance policies to allow for excused absences for behavioral health concerns.

Bill B – Need for Juvenile Behavioral Health Treatment. Bill B requires the School Safety Resource Center in the Department of Public Safety to convene a working group to examine the needs of school districts regarding the availability of behavioral health treatment for children and youth with severe behavioral or mental health disorders.

Bill C – Expand Behavioral Health Training for K-12 Educators. Bill C requires the Colorado Department of Education to offer a train-the-trainer program to employees of school districts, charter schools, or boards of cooperative services. The program must be designed to improve overall school climate, promote youth behavioral and mental health, and prepare an attendee to teach a youth behavioral and mental health training course to other school employees.

Bill D – Enhance Safe2Tell. Bill D requires the Safe2Tell program to devise a process so that all calls and texts are received initially by a crisis operator and non-crisis calls and texts are routed appropriately. Further, the program must align the process and procedures for all tips, regardless of communication method, and conduct an annual advertising campaign regarding awareness, use, and misuse of Safe2Tell. The bill allows the Attorney General to, upon request of a law enforcement agency, disclose to law enforcement personnel information obtained through Safe2Tell if the Attorney General reasonably believes the disclosure is necessary to prevent imminent physical harm or serious bodily injury.

Bill E – Colorado Working Group on School Safety. Bill E creates the Colorado Interagency Working Group on School Safety in the Colorado Department of Education. The working group is tasked with increasing coordination of school safety programs across state government, and includes representatives from state departments, school districts, law enforcement, and the legislature. The bill identifies topics of study for the working group, including school safety best practices and standards, the use of lockdown drills, risk assessments and training, vendors and tools, standardization regarding investigation of threats to schools, the state auditor’s 2019 report regarding school safety, and other issues.

Resolution A – Support I Love U Guys Foundation. Resolution A expresses support for the I Love U Guys Foundation, which develops programs and initiatives to support school safety.