

SCHOOL SECURITY PLANS SAVE LIVES

STATEMENT by William J. Kowalski, Director of Operations, Rehmann Corporate Investigative Services - 248.458.7870
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BY way of introduction, my name is William Kowalski. I am currently the Director of Operations for Rehmann Corporate Investigative Services. I spent over 25 years as a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the last five as the Operations Commander for the Joint Terrorism Task Force for the State of Michigan. I have extensive training and experience in conducting threat assessments and crisis response.

Last month charges were filed against three teens allegedly planning a mass shooting at Linden High School in Argentine Township. To their credit, and our collective relief, the Argentine Township Police Department intercepted the plot before Michigan schools joined the ever-growing list of mass shooting victims. The issue before you today regarding school security funding is both necessary and timely. The recent terror events in San Bernardino, California, while not targeted at a school, reveal the vulnerabilities of “soft targets” like schools, and point to a need for experienced security professionals to apply the proven principles learned in high-stakes military and industrial security settings to protect our schools, and our children.

The trend of violence in schools has become more than alarming, but the solutions offered have fallen short of the mark, hampered by budget constraints, and suffering from lack of expertise. It has become apparent a new approach is needed, one that provides the proper blend of professional assessment, coordinated training, law enforcement liaison, open communication, physical security tools and practiced implementation.

School Superintendents and legislators realize school safety is a high priority, but funding for such programs can be complicated because there is no single perfect answer. However, Superintendents who have suffered violent events concur that a threat assessment and documented response plan would have been helpful. We can learn from their hindsight that assessments and planning are effective exercises in ensuring proper crisis response and threat mitigation. Security experts who conduct such threat assessments provide ample evidence of their value. Assessments allow Superintendents to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their districts so they can immediately focus on making their schools as safe as possible before an event occurs, and react effectively should an event occur.

An investment in school safety assessments on the front-end can save money and careers, but most importantly, it saves lives -- the lives of our school children, our teachers, our school employees and our first responders.

House Bill 4388 is one vehicle to deliver resources to provide school safety assessments and implement security improvements.

Admittedly, there are many demands on the State budget, and the cost of an assessment is not inexpensive. But what is the real cost to a State, a District and a Superintendent if there is not a plan or procedure in place to address the safety and security threats schools now face?

Preparation for an event that has not yet occurred can be a difficult item to support. “What if it does not happen?” is a familiar argument, but one I propose is obsolete in this case. The threat is painfully real and the decision not to act is a risk we cannot take. Not acting would be more costly in the long term than the combined investment of planning and preparing. The financial cost of a single violent event is astronomical. The human cost is incalculable.

The question for Michigan’s Legislators and Superintendents today is clear: Are you willing to roll the dice with school safety and take a risk with children’s lives and your liability? Or will you invest in security assessments which will allow schools to address their weaknesses in a timely manner?

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