

# Priority Recommendations

## House Select Committee on School Safety

### Counseling & Mental Health

#### 1. School Counselor Realignment

- a. The General Assembly should realign the roles and responsibilities of school counselors to ensure school counselors are spending the majority of their time providing direct student services, including emotional, behavioral, career, and life counseling and guidance.
- b. The General Assembly should fund new school-based staff positions (e.g., testing coordinator) to relieve school counselors of additional administrative duties and ensure they have sufficient time to provide counseling services.

#### 2. Addressing Mental and Behavioral Health in Schools

- a. The General Assembly should implement a statewide mental health and suicide prevention tip line, similar to SafeUT, that students can access to receive real-time crisis-intervention counseling and report threats of violence.
- b. The General Assembly should require mental and emotional health be taught as a component of any family life education program offered in a local school division.
- c. Recognizing that student mental health is a growing and multifaceted issue and that policy-making should be informed by adequate evidence and subject-matter expertise, the General Assembly should create a Commission on Student Mental Health to study, among other topics, the:
  - i. Current school counselor-to-student ratio and whether the proposed realignment of counseling responsibilities is improving the delivery of direct student services;
  - ii. Feasibility and affordability of enhanced wrap-around mental health services in schools through partnerships with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Medical Assistance Services, and Community Services Boards;
  - iii. Effectiveness of de-escalation and alternative disciplinary policies when interacting with students suffering from mental health challenges;
  - iv. Value of additional teacher training requirements on student mental health, such as mental health first aid.
- d. The General Assembly should amend the Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA) so that community services can be provided to juveniles before they are brought before the court on a complaint or petition.

### Training & School Security

## 1. Enhanced Training

- a. The General Assembly should prioritize increased funding to the Center for School and Campus Safety to:
  - i. Provide training to education and law enforcement professionals;
  - ii. Implement a statewide school climate survey;
  - iii. Maintain a catalog of best practices that is regularly shared with school divisions, as well as with law enforcement, fire safety, and emergency services departments.
- b. The General Assembly should require the Center for School and Campus Safety to create a standardized data collection and reporting template to be used by all threat assessment teams across the Commonwealth.
- c. The General Assembly should require annual school-wide training for students and faculty on school safety procedures

## 2. School Resource Officers and School Security Officers

- a. The General Assembly should prioritize increased funding for the School Resource Officer Grants Program to fund 44 new SRO positions, which would reduce the current unfunded demand by half.
- b. The General Assembly should require all school divisions that receive funding through the School Resource Officer Grants Program to enter into an MOU with local law enforcement that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the School Resource Officer, the school division, and the law enforcement agency.
- c. The General Assembly should amend the Code of Virginia to allow retired law enforcement officers to be hired as School Resource Officers or School Security Officers without affecting their retirement benefits.

## 3. Preparedness

- a. The General Assembly should increase the amount of funding made available for grants to eligible school divisions pursuant to the School Security Equipment Grant Act of 2013 for the purpose of purchasing security equipment for schools.
- b. The General Assembly should require the inclusion of local school divisions in the public safety voice communications system.

## 4. Campus and Infrastructure

- a. Change the date of the primary elections held in June from the second Tuesday in June to the third Tuesday in June to ensure schools are no longer in session. This will mitigate safety concerns with having thousands of individuals unaffiliated with the school on and in school property while students and faculty are in class.

- b. Make the November election day a student holiday/staff clerical day to mitigate safety concerns with having thousands of individuals unaffiliated with the school on and in school property while students and faculty are in class.
- c. The General Assembly should require each school board to collaborate with the local fire department to ensure proposed security enhancements are compliant with building and fire codes.
- d. The General Assembly should require school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans to be developed and reviewed collaboratively by school boards and first responders.
- e. The General Assembly should require a professional who is trained and experienced in Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) review and implementation to review each school building project, including new construction and renovation projects.

## **Miscellaneous**

### 1. Recommendations for Localities

- a. Localities should enter into mutual aid agreements with other localities to provide emergency services.
- b. School boards should require employees who are responsible for procurement to work with local fire marshals to ensure that any infrastructure improvement complies with the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC).
- c. School divisions should increase collaboration among the various stakeholders in school safety audits and crisis management planning.
- d. Localities should establish consensus-driven stakeholder processes for school design and security planning that include public safety personnel, architects, engineers, school officials, and others who may have experience and expertise with school safety audits.
- e. Design professionals, school officials, police chiefs/sheriffs, fire officials, and building officials should form a team at the local level to avoid conflicts in law and regulations when the E (educational) occupancy is having any type of security infrastructure improvements made for new or existing E occupancies.