

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY, No. 180

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 220th LEGISLATURE

DATED: MARCH 20, 2023

SUMMARY

- Synopsis:** Directs Attorney General to establish program for anonymous reporting of potential threats to school safety.
- Type of Impact:** Annual State expenditure increase.
- Agencies Affected:** Department of Law and Public Safety; Department of Education; New Jersey Education and Law Enforcement Working Group; County and Municipal Law Enforcement; Local School Districts.

Office of Legislative Services Estimate

Fiscal Impact	
Annual State Expenditure Increase	Up to \$100,000

- The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) notes that, according to the Department of Law and Public Safety, there are currently two programs offered by the Division of State Police that serve the same purpose as the anonymous reporting program contemplated by the bill. Specifically, the Division of State Police currently maintains the School Safety Hotline and Text to 9-1-1. The OLS concludes that the department will have to dedicate resources of no more than a 1.0 full-time equivalent employee to meet the requirements of the bill, and as such estimates a maximum annual State expenditure increase of \$100,000.
- The OLS estimates that any State cost increases would be related to the bill's requirements to: 1) establish a program for anonymously reporting certain information; 2) establish training for certain parties on how to appropriately collect and respond to the reported information; 3) establish an awareness campaign for the program, including education materials, for public and non-public schools Statewide; and 4) establish and publish an annual report of the data collected.

BILL DESCRIPTION

This bill requires the Attorney General, in consultation with the New Jersey Education and Law Enforcement Working Group, to establish a program that provides a means for the public to

anonymously report information concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities in schools or the threat of those activities.

This bill also requires the Attorney General to annually prepare a report on the program and submit the report to the Governor and the Education Committees of the Senate and General Assembly and post the report on the website of the Department of Law and Public Safety annually.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

According to a representative with the Department of Law and Public Safety, there are currently two programs offered by the Division of State Police that serve the same purpose as the program contemplated by the bill. Specifically, the Division of State Police currently maintains the School Safety Hotline and Text to 9-1-1.

The School Safety Hotline is a toll-free number maintained by the State Police and designed for receiving tips in reference to school safety and security. This hotline has been operational since 1999 and is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by the State Police Call Center Unit. Any calls to the hotline are directed to any available public safety telecommunicator. Although this program provides the State Police the ability to receive phone calls, it is not capable of receiving text messages.

Thus, in addition to the hotline, the Division of State Police utilizes the Text to 9-1-1 program, which enhances communication capabilities and provides a more user-friendly alternative to calling. Texting allows users to request emergency response without needing to make a telephone call for assistance. This service also provides 9-1-1 access to those with hearing impairments or speech disorders who previously were unable to access 9-1-1 due to an inability to speak or hear on a phone. However, the purpose of texting to 9-1-1 is to report emergencies rather than anonymous tips.

In addition to the Division of State Police hotline and text options, each county maintains its own hotline, website, or both for submitting anonymous tips. A designated funding source is used to maintain these anonymous reporting programs. The New Jersey Schools Insurance Group has approximately 400 members participating in its NJSIG Incident Reporting Program.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

The OLS estimates that the bill may result in an increased cost to the Office of the Attorney General in the Department of Law and Public Safety.

Annual Department of Law and Public Safety Expenditures – The bill requires the Department of Law and Public Safety to establish a program for anonymously reporting information concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities in schools or the threat of those activities by students, parents, school staff, and other community members through a telephone tip line or a mobile application. The OLS concludes that the department will have to dedicate resources of no more than a 1.0 full-time equivalent employee to meet the requirements of the bill, and as such estimates a maximum annual State expenditure increase of \$100,000.

The bill requires training to be provided to law enforcement dispatch centers, school districts, nonpublic schools, and other entities determined by the Attorney General on awareness of the program and appropriate response to tips received through the program. The OLS estimates that the Department of Law and Public Safety may be able to absorb the additional workload of training

within their existing operating budgets based on the establishment of the memorandum for use between local law enforcement and education officials to work together to address school related issues, problems, and emergencies of mutual concern.

The bill also requires the establishment of an awareness campaign of the program, including education materials, for public and non-public schools Statewide. The OLS estimates the department may be able to absorb the additional workload of establishing the campaign within their existing operating budgets; however, depending on the resources used to distribute the information, costs to implement this requirement are indeterminate.

Finally, the bill requires the Department of Law and Public Safety to establish and publish an annual report of the data collected and submit the report annually to the Governor and the Education Committees of the Senate and General Assembly as well as post the report on its Internet website. The OLS estimates that the department may be able to absorb the additional workload of reporting within their existing operating budgets.

Background – According to the New Jersey Department of Education, in 2020-2021 there were 2,493 schools in 686 school districts. There are 1,119 listed non-public schools for the same year.

Section: Law and Public Safety

*Analyst: Kristin Brunner Santos
Lead Fiscal Analyst*

*Approved: Thomas Koenig
Legislative Budget and Finance Officer*

This fiscal estimate has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67 (C.52:13B-6 et seq.).