

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 4977

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 16, 2023

The Assembly Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 4977 with committee amendments.

This bill establishes the School Safety and Security Task Force. The purpose of the task force will be to study and develop recommendations to improve school safety and security, and to ensure a safe learning environment for students and employees.

Under the bill, the task force will consist of 17 members as follows: the Commissioner of Education, or a designee; the Director of the Office of Homeland Security, or a designee; the Chief Executive Officer of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority, or a designee; the Chief School Administrator of a nonpublic school; eight members appointed by the Governor including one each from the New Jersey Association of School Business Officials, the New Jersey Education Association, the New Jersey School Boards Association, the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, the New Jersey College and University Public Safety Association, and the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association; and five members of the public, three of whom have demonstrated expertise in the development or implementation of school security standards or technology, one of whom is an active or retired law enforcement officer, and one of whom is an active or retired mental health professional. The members of the public will be appointed by the Governor upon consideration of the recommendation of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the General Assembly.

It will be the duty of the task force to identify potential breaches of security in the public schools, and make recommendations to improve school safety and security. The issues studied by the task force will include, but are not limited to:

- (1) placing screening systems at school entrances;
- (2) stationing school resource officers in each school building;
- (3) improving response times to emergency situations, including lockdowns, active shooter, and bomb threats;
- (4) requiring advanced student and visitor identification cards;

(5) using biometric, retina, or other advanced recognition systems for authorized entrance into school buildings;

(6) the effectiveness of installing panic alarms in school buildings to alert local law enforcement authorities to emergency situations, required under “Alyssa’s Law”;

(7) scheduling periodic patrols of school buildings and grounds by local law enforcement officers;

(8) hardening the school perimeter and building entryways; and

(9) considering strategies to ensure the needs of students with disabilities are reflected in all areas of emergency planning and response measures.

Also under the bill, the task force will review and develop recommendations on building security and assessment standards for existing school facilities and new construction, including, but not limited to, standards for:

(1) architectural design for new construction;

(2) assessing and abating security risks in existing school facilities;

(3) emergency communication plans;

(4) staff training; and

(5) addressing elevated risk factors, including proximity to a chemical facility or nuclear power plant.

The task force will issue a final report of its findings and recommendations, including any recommended legislation, to the Governor and the Legislature no later than six months after its organizational meeting. The task force will expire upon the issuance of the final report.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

- increase the membership of the School Safety and Security Task Force to 17 members by adding a Chief School Administrator from a nonpublic school, and representatives from the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, and the New Jersey College and University Public Safety Association;
- direct the task force to consider strategies for ensuring that the needs of students with disabilities are reflected in all areas of emergency planning and response measures; and
- stipulate that the presence of at least five members is needed to constitute a quorum for the conducting of official task force business, but any recommendations of the task force are to be approved by a majority of the members present.