ASSEMBLY, No. 5473

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 15, 2021

Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman LINDA S. CARTER
District 22 (Middlesex, Somerset and Union)
Assemblywoman VALERIE VAINIERI HUTTLE
District 37 (Bergen)
Assemblyman ANTHONY S. VERRELLI
District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)

Co-Sponsored by:
Assemblyman Caputo and Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson

SYNOPSIS

Directs Attorney General to establish program for anonymous reporting of potential threats to school safety.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/24/2021)

AN ACT concerning school safety threats and supplementing chapter 41 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. The Attorney General of the State of New Jersey shall establish a program that provides the ability for the public to anonymously report information concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities in schools or the threat of those activities. The program shall:

a. establish and maintain readily accessible methods of anonymous reporting, which may include, but need not be limited to, a telephone tip line and mobile application;

b. allow for any member of the public to report information, including students, parents, school staff members, and other community members;

c. establish methods and procedures to ensure that the identity of the reporting party remains unknown to all persons and entities, except in instances where the reporting party voluntarily discloses his identity and verifies that his identity may be shared with law enforcement officers, school officials, and employees operating the program;

d. promptly forward information received by the program to the appropriate law enforcement agencies or school officials;

e. provide training 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; and

f. provide program awareness and education materials to all public and nonpublic schools in the State.

2. a. The Attorney General shall annually prepare a report on the program. The report shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

(1) the total number of reports made to the program, disaggregated by subgroups to be determined by the Attorney General;

(2) the dates, times, and means of reporting;

(3) the total number of instances of misuse of the program; and

(4) a summary of the outcomes and actions taken on reports made to the program.

b. The Attorney General shall submit the report to the Governor and the Education Committees of the Senate and General Assembly and post the report on the Internet website of the Department of Law and Public Safety by January 1 of the following year.

3. This act shall take effect on the first day of the seventh month next following the date of enactment.

STATEMENT

This bill requires the Attorney General 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. The program will allow students, parents, school staff, and other community members to anonymously report information through readily accessible methods such as a telephone tip line or mobile application. The program must ensure that the identity of the reporting party remains unknown, except in instances where the reporting party voluntarily discloses his identity and verifies that his identity may be shared with law enforcement officers, school officials, and employees operating the program. The bill requires that information received through the program be promptly shared with the appropriate law enforcement agencies or school officials.

Under the bill, training will 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. In addition, program awareness and education materials will be provided to all public and nonpublic schools in the State. The program established under this bill would be similar to Colorado's "Safe2Tell" program, which provides an anonymous and readily accessible tool for the reporting and sharing of information regarding potential threats to school safety.

This bill also requires the Attorney General to annually prepare a report on the program that includes, but is not limited to, the following: (1) the total number of reports made to the program, disaggregated by subgroups to be determined by the Attorney General; (2) the dates, times, and means of reporting; (3) the total number of instances of misuse of the program; and (4) a summary of the outcomes and actions taken on reports made to the program. The Attorney General is required to submit the report to the Governor and the Education Committees of the Senate and General Assembly and post the report on the Internet website of the Department of Law and Public Safety by January 1 of the year immediately following issuance of the report.