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Our community, like many others across the United States, faces growing concerns over violence, mental health crises, and the readiness of our schools to respond to emergencies. The creation of a dedicated Bureau of School Security is a significant step forward, but its impact depends on how effectively it is structured, supported, and aligned with the mission of our schools.

Certified Peace Officers to fill required positions will be critical for the success of the bureau. Data shows that approximately 58% of public schools reported having at least one sworn **Peace Officer** commonly known as a **School Resource Officer or (SRO)** present.

While the terms “SROs” and “Peace Officers” are often used interchangeably, they can differ in scope and function. SROs are typically assigned to specific schools and have roles that may include mentoring, teaching, and building relationships with students, in addition to providing security. In contrast, peace officers may be assigned to multiple schools or have broader responsibilities within a district.

It’s important to note that the presence of SROs and armed peace officers in schools varies by state and district, influenced by factors such as local policies, community needs, and funding availability.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) regularly collects and reports data on school safety and security practices.

Security Camera Usage in Public Schools

The percentage of public schools using security cameras to monitor schools has increased significantly over time:

- **2017–2018:** 83.5%

- **2019–2020:** 91.1%

- **2021–2022:** 92.6%

Trends in School Safety Measures

The increase in security measures, including the use of security cameras, reflects a broader trend of heightened concern for school safety. While these measures aim to enhance security, their effectiveness in preventing incidents and their impact on the school environment continue to be subjects of study and debate.

As of the 2021–2022 school year, approximately 44% of U.S. Public Schools reported having an SRO present on campus. This figure represents a slight decrease from 49% in 2019–2020 but is consistent with pre-pandemic levels.

Peace Officers who routinely carry firearms, 45% of public schools reported having such officers on site in 2021–2022, down from 51% in 2019–2020.

The presence of SROs differs based on a school’s size and location. For example, 77% of schools with 1,000 or more students had an SRO, compared to just 24% of schools with fewer than 300 students.

Threat Assessment Teams and Security Measures

During the 2019–2020 school year, about 64% of schools reported having a threat assessment team in place, a formalized process to identify and manage students who may pose a threat of targeted violence.

Throughout the United States there are several schools that have an established school security bureau or equivalent, but most are linked with the local or state police departments.

- **Texas**

Following the 2022 Uvalde school shooting, Texas created the Office of School Safety and Security within the Texas Education Agency. This office coordinates statewide safety efforts, provides technical

assistance to local districts, and works closely with law enforcement agencies.

- **Iowa**

Iowa established the Governor's School Safety Bureau to enhance school security. The bureau focuses on providing resources, action plans, and coordination with law enforcement to improve school safety across the state.

- **New Hampshire**

New Hampshire's School Safety and Facility Management Bureau, part of the Department of Education, offers leadership and technical assistance to schools for planning and financing school facilities, including safety measures.

- **New York**

New York City Police Department School Safety Division: With approximately 5,000 School Safety Agents and 200 police officers, this division is one of the largest school-based law enforcement agencies in the U.S.

Concerns with the Proposed Bureau

Rather than solving existing issues, the proposed Bureau risks introducing overlapping responsibilities and mission conflict between education and law enforcement.

The Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) already plays a vital role in maintaining public safety, including within school settings. Building upon and refining this existing framework would be more effective than creating redundant structures.

Risk of Blurring Educational and Enforcement Roles

Schools must remain centers of learning, growth, and support not enforcement zones. The introduction of a new, separate security agency embedded within the Department of Education risks blurring the lines between safety and policing, potentially criminalizing student behavior that should be addressed through educational and counseling channels.

We have seen across the nation that when security functions are not clearly defined from educational goals, it can lead to unintended consequences including, increased suspensions, disproportionate discipline of minority and special needs students, and erosion of trust between students and school personnel.

Resource Constraints and Sustainability

The creation of a new agency demands substantial financial and human resources, resources being peace officers that the territory already struggles to provide across sectors, especially VIPD. Rather than divert funding to launch a new bureau, those limited funds should be directed to:

- Hiring additional counselors and mental health professionals,
- Investing in training as proposed in this bill and retention of existing SROs, and
- Strengthening coordination between VIPD and the Department of Education.

Alternatives to a New Bureau

Rather than creating an entirely new law enforcement department within the department of education, DOE should:

- Enhance the SRO program, ensuring that officers are appropriately trained in trauma informed practices and cultural sensitivity.
- Develop territory-wide protocols for school safety and emergency response under the guidance of existing agency policies.

- Provide additional support and funding to POST for the training and certification of officers stationed in schools.

Conclusion

Establishing a separate Bureau of School Security within the Department of Education is not necessary currently. Instead, strengthen existing structures, enhance training and coordination, and ensure clear distinctions between educational and law enforcement responsibilities. While student safety must remain a top priority, it is equally important to protect the integrity of our schools as safe, supportive learning environments.

I respectfully urge the committee to reconsider this bill and prioritize sustainable, integrated, and community-informed approaches to school safety.

Thank you, Honorable Chairman Kurt Vialet, bill sponsor Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., and members of the committee, for your time and commitment. I am available to answer any questions you may have.