

R00A06

Maryland Center for School Safety

Response to the Analyst's Review and Recommendations

House Education and Economic Development Subcommittee –

February 25, 2019

Senate Education, Business, and Administration Subcommittee –

February 28, 2019



Maryland Center for School Safety

A Safer School Begins with You.

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Executive Director

The Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) appreciates the opportunity to update the Committee on the activities of MCSS and respond to the issues raised and recommendations contained in the operating budget analysis prepared by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS).

Performance Analysis: Managing for Results

MCSS should discuss what specific performance measures the agency is considering and how that data will measure the effectiveness that the center is having on providing support to local school systems as they work to maintain school safety.

As mentioned in the DLS Budget Analysis Report, MCSS and the School Safety Subcabinet have met all statutory deadlines required by the Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018. MCSS will use measures as outlined in the Safe to Learn Act of 2018 as well as other data inputs and outputs including personnel counts for School Resource Officers (SROs) and security staff to be trained, training deliveries, website and other engagement communication analytics (e.g., social media), tip line statistics, and meeting/event engagements. Specific Managing for Results performance measures for the MCSS will be developed in time for the next budget submission.

Fiscal 2020 Allowance

The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends the addition of budget language expressing the budget committees' intent that this program and the associated funding be transferred back to MCSS so that all school safety-related operating grants are consolidated within one agency.

MCSS concurs.

DLS estimates that an additional \$400,000 in one-time funding could be removed from the center's fiscal 2020 budget.

MCSS concurs.

Issues

Fiscal 2019 and 2020 School Safety Grant Funding

The School Safety Subcabinet, IAC, and MCSS should comment on the status of the grant award process, including what was done to ensure adequate outreach to school systems regarding the availability of funding and application support, and the anticipated timeframe and methodologies for awarding fiscal 2020 grants. MCSS should also discuss whether the operating grants awarded in fiscal 2019 are of a one-time nature or whether similar needs exist in fiscal 2020 that cannot be adequately covered by the \$600,000 provided in the allowance.

The Notification of Funding Availability for the Safe Schools Fund included traffic/pedestrian safety initiatives and was made available to all local school systems. In an effort to ensure all interested parties were aware of the grant funds, MSDE published the funding notification on the

main page of the website and the notice was shared with Local School Superintendents and school safety partners. MCSS made regular reminders about all available grants on our weekly school safety calls. Regional staff that have been hired in FY19 have been regularly reaching out to local school systems on grant deadlines.

For FY 2020, the Subcabinet, MCSS, and IAC will be working to establish funding priorities and needs as MCSS reviews the safety evaluations of the local school systems, which are due by June 15, 2019. Additionally, at the request of the Subcabinet, MCSS developed a 2019 work plan for the School Safety Advisory Board. This work plan includes a topic during the May meeting agenda to discuss the priority areas where the Safe to Learn grants funds could be focused and provide the Subcabinet with recommendations on notice of funding development for FY 2020 grants.

In FY 2019, MCSS administered and managed three (3) separate and distinct grant funds as follows: Safe Schools Fund (combination of \$10 million in general funds and \$600,000 in special funds which could be awarded to local school systems), Hate Crimes Grant Fund (\$1 million in general funds which could be awarded to schools and child care centers determined to be at risk of hate crimes), and School Safety Evaluations (\$2.5 million in general funds which could be awarded to local school systems to comply with the mandates of Md. Code Ann., Ed. Art. §7-1510). The \$600,000 in special funds have been included in the School Bus Safety grant since FY14 and were administered prior to FY19 by the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention.

Maryland School Safety Tip Line Resources Are Not Included in the Maryland Emergency Management Agency Budget

MCSS should discuss the development of the tip line and what is being done to maximize outreach to students, staff, and the community. The agency should also discuss its role in tracking tips and disseminating information. Finally, MCSS should update the committees on the status of providing the agreed upon funding and positions to MEMA for fiscal 2019.

MCSS FY19 budget did not account for the \$392,000 funding to cover the tip line software and staff to take the tips. MCSS used savings from delayed hiring of allotted positions and the associated operational savings to cover the costs of the tip line in FY19. MCSS does not have the staff or facility requirements to run an anonymous 24/7 tip line directly. If MCSS is not able to provide MEMA with the funding necessary to cover the costs associated with staff of five tip takers, MEMA will no longer be able to provide the 24/7 tip taking services and the Safe Schools Maryland Tip Line will have to end. Currently, without cuts, the MCSS FY20 budget does include the necessary funding to support the Safe Schools Maryland Tip Line.

Background:

Based on research from the U.S. Secret Service, in 81% of violent incidents in U.S. schools, at least one person other than the attacker knew about of the attacker's plan but failed to report it. Following the tragic events in Parkland, Florida and Great Mills High School in St. Mary's County in early 2018, the State worked together to pass the Safe to Learn Act of 2018.

During that time and while in discussions on school safety best practices with states nationwide, it became clear that an anonymous school safety tip line would benefit communities in Maryland. The launch of a State school safety tip line became a priority in the summer of 2018.

The states we spoke to about their programs (Colorado, and Oregon) noted the time and effort it took to get their programs off the ground and even the time it took to get the message out to the students and community about the tip line.

The operation of an anonymous 24/7 tip line requires technology, infrastructure, and software in addition to staff to receive and route the tips. The management and operation of a 24/7 call center requires availability and redundancy around the clock for equipment, personnel, and communication mechanisms to handle incoming tips. It was determined right away that MCSS did not have the staffing or facility requirements to answer these tips directly. MCSS looked at several of the 24/7 existing centers as options. The anonymous nature of the tip line required non-recorded lines and a different approach than those utilized in other State centers. The Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) had the expertise and facility to operate the tip line.

MCSS approached MEMA and MEMA agreed to support MCSS. MEMA handled the entire implementation of the tip line to include developing the initial tip processing procedures as well as training the Tip Processing Agents (TPAs) and participating schools.

At the same time, the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) was working to find an existing software solution that could be used to manage the intake, routing, and disposition of tips. After researching options, DoIT recommended the one year use of P3 Campus by Anderson Software for \$92K. P3 Campus is the same system used by the State of Colorado.

Outreach:

On October 3, 2018, Governor Hogan, MEMA, MSDE, and MCSS announced at a press conference the launch of the “Safe Schools Maryland Tip Line”.

Students and school community members can anonymously report information to Safe Schools Maryland via a mobile app, online at www.SafeSchoolsMD.org, or by calling 1-833-MD-B-SAFE (1-833-632-7233).

MSDE and MCSS commenced outreach to local school systems, students, staff, and the community immediately. There were printed Safe School Maryland materials distributed to all local school systems.

Currently, MCSS has billboard advertisement on all ClearChannel digital billboards. MCSS promotes the tip line on its website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn social media pages and our posts are reshared by state and local partners. MCSS continues to work through strategies to enhance community engagement with the tool and knowledge about this valuable resource. MCSS is partnering with the Maryland Association of Student Councils to establish a focus group of students by Fall 2019 to gather feedback and develop strategies for peer-to-peer education about and promotion of the tip line.

Tip Volume:

The Safe Schools Maryland Tip Line isn't just about the number of tips processed; it is about the processing of each tip from start to finish. Each tip provided is unique and the skillset to process each tip is equally as unique. Processing a tip is not just simply a transfer of information. Each tip could take hours to process from the time the first call, text, or online entry is received until the Tip Processing Agent has successfully routed the information to the correct representative. The training for the Tip Processing Agents includes not only use of the online data collection system, but also mental health training - what questions to ask and how to ask those questions. This is a unique skill set that the Tip Processing Agents have and need to have to be successful.

At the end of each shift, it doesn't matter whether the Tip Processing Agent received one tip that day or twenty. One tip may make the difference for an individual or a community and aid the prevention of violence.

Tracking Tips:

The tip line is currently serving over 1800 Maryland schools including all public schools, many non-public special education schools, and private schools. The partnership between MCSS, MEMA, local schools, and local authorities support the school safety for our students. Tip line activity is discussed on a weekly call with our statewide school safety partners. Currently, all MCSS regional and key staff have the necessary access to the system to monitor and work with local schools to close out tips.

Funding:

In the initial conversations with MEMA, it was determined that five contractual positions would be needed to support the tip line at a cost to MCSS of \$300,000.

Operating Budget Recommended Actions

1. FY 2019 on-time operating expenses: *Reduce funding in the amount of \$400,000 in fiscal 2020 for one-time fiscal 2019 operating expenses associated with the initial expansion of the Maryland Center for School Safety's mission.*

MCSS concurs.

2. MCSS tip line: *Delete funding for the Maryland School Safety Tip Line. This tip line operates out of the Maryland Joint Operations Center within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency and should be funded from that agency's resources. Recommended reduction of \$300,000 to the Center.*

MCSS respectfully disagrees with this recommendation.

3. Add the following language: Provided that it is the intent of the budget committees that all operating grant funds provided to improve the safety and security of Maryland's schools and child care centers should be administered within one agency. In fulfillment of this, it is the intent of the budget committees that \$2,000,000 in general funds currently budgeted within the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Development (R00A01.010) for security improvement grants to schools and child care centers at risk of hate crimes be transferred to the Maryland Center for School Safety (R00A06.02).

MCSS concurs.