

# MARYLAND CENTER for SCHOOL SAFETY

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Senator Nancy King, Chair  
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee - Education, Business, and Administration

Delegate Stephanie Smith, Chair  
House Appropriations Committee - Education and Economic Development

**From:** Kate Bryan, Executive Director *MB*

**Date:** House - February 1, 2024  
Senate - February 8, 2024

**Subject:** Fiscal Year 2025 – MCSS Operational Budget Response (R00A06)  
MSDE Headquarters (R00A01)

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2023 marked year five (5) since the enactment of the Safe To Learn Act of 2018, prompting the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) to review all statutory requirements to ensure compliance and identify additional needs of local educational stakeholders. MCSS 2024 priorities were identified as a result of these reviews. As such, I am delighted to share our recent accomplishments with you, which are detailed in our [2023 Annual Report](#). MCSS will continue to work collaboratively with school safety partners and stakeholders to make schools a safe place for students to learn and thrive.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the fiscal year 2025 budget analysis and thank the Department of Legislative Services Budget Analyst, Laura Hyde for completing a very thorough and effective review of the Center's budget.

### **SRO Grant Underspent in Fiscal 2023**

As part of mandated funding in Chapter 30, LEAs may apply for the SRO grant program, which offset costs for hiring SROs. In fiscal 2023, MCSS allocated approximately \$3.8 million out of \$10.0 million to LEAs for SRO grants, closing the fiscal year with an unspent balance of \$6.2 million for this grant program, with canceled funds returning to the Safe Schools Fund.

**MCSS should discuss efforts to maximize the use of the SRO grant and LEA School Safety Evaluation Grants.**

*In addition to existing efforts by MCSS to maximize the use of the SRO Grant, MCSS will:*

- 1. Rollout the Notification of Funding Availability (NOFA) as early as April of each year, provided there are no proposed cuts to the funding or the overall program in the DLS analysis and recommendation of MCSS' budget. This will allow LEAs to include their allocations in budget submissions or amendments to their respective board of education or governing body. It would also reduce the risk of supplanting and allow LEAs to supplement their SRO adequate coverage local budgetary allocations.*
- 2. Allow LEAs to reallocate local funding to hire new officers (cadets) and use the SRO Grant to cover some or all of their SRO and adequate coverage costs.*
- 3. Continue outreach efforts to LEAs and LE agencies.*
- 4. Continue to simplify the grant application process making it easier for LEAs and LE contacts with limited grant writing skills to be able to apply.*
- 5. Reallocate unobligated SRO Grant funds to other jurisdictions who have fully expended their allocations halfway through the fiscal year and have demonstrated the need for additional funding to support their SRO and adequate coverage costs.*

*MCSS will continue outreach efforts to LEAs that did not apply for the School Safety Evaluation Grant in FY2024. As part of this effort, we will collaborate with those who did not apply for the one-time grant. By working closely with each local education agency who did not apply for the grant, we hope to identify and resolve any concerns or challenges in the application process.*

**Operating Budget Recommended Actions**

**4.** Reduce general funds to the Maryland Center for School Safety for the School Resource Officer grant program by \$3.0 million. This reduction will be backfilled with special funds from the Safe School Fund balance.

\$ 3,000,000 GF

*MCSS respectfully disagrees with this recommendation.*

*Education article 7-1508(g)(1) states... "the Governor shall include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$10,000,000 to the Fund for the purpose of providing*

*grants to local school systems and local law enforcement agencies to assist in meeting the requirements of subsection (e) of this section.”*

*MCSS respectfully requests that the statute be implemented as written.*

**5.** Add the following language to the special fund appropriation:

\$3,000,000 in special funds is added to the appropriation for program R00A06.02 Maryland Center for School Safety – Grants within the Maryland Center for School Safety budget for the purpose of funding the School Resource Officer grant program. Funds not expended for this added purpose may not be transferred by budget amendment or otherwise to any other purpose and shall revert to the Safe Schools Fund.

Explanation: This language adds \$3.0 million in special funds to the appropriation for the School Resource Officer grant in the Maryland Center for School Safety budget.

*MCSS respectfully disagrees with this recommendation.*

*If the full \$10.0M in GF is provided to seed the \$10.M in SF for the SRO Grant (as indicated in our response in #4 above), then there would be no need for the \$3.0M in special funds to be added to the appropriation for program R00A06.02. There would also be no need for the proposed additional language above.*

**6.** Reduces special funds for the new Emergency Preparedness grant in the Maryland Center for School Safety. Local education agencies can fund emergency preparedness planning within their operating budgets.  
\$ 3,000,000 SF

*MCSS respectfully disagrees with this recommendation.*

*As statutorily required, MCSS has received and reviewed local school emergency plans and after-action reports related to critical life threatening (CLT) incidents that occur on public school grounds. MCSS also reviews after-action reports for incidents outside of Maryland. A review of emergency plans and reports overtime has exposed a critical need for local public schools to prioritize school emergency preparedness activities including conducting school facility assessments, updating emergency operations plans, training the school community on response protocols, testing emergency plans, and identifying and correcting areas for improvement. These activities are often included as secondary and tertiary responsibilities for school and school system staff already overburdened reacting to real-world events.*

*To address this need, MCSS included in its FY2025 budget a new grant for LEAs to be used specifically to address emergency preparedness needs. This new grant would be used by local school systems to support local all-hazard emergency preparedness activities including:*

- 1. Updating school emergency plans;*
- 2. Conducting emergency management-related training activities;*
- 3. Designing, developing, conducting and evaluating all-hazard emergency exercises that include the whole school community (i.e., staff, students, responders, parents);*
- 4. Conducting after-action reviews following exercises and real-world events;  
and*
- 5. Developing a tool to monitor and track corrective actions to completion.*

*The grant would be distributed with a minimum allocation per LEA with the remainder of the funds allocated based on the formula established in the Safe to Learn Act of 2018 for SRO grants. Statutory requirements, recent events, recommendations, and after-action reports indicate a need for more funding to support schools and school systems in conducting planning, training, exercising, evaluation, and improvement planning activities in preparation for any emergency.*