

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

Date: House - February 6, 2025
Senate - February 7, 2025

Subject: Fiscal Year 2026 – MCSS Operational Budget Response (R00A06)
MSDE Headquarters (R00A01)

MCSS continues to work collaboratively with school safety partners and stakeholders to make schools a safe place for students to learn and thrive. As such, I am delighted to share our recent accomplishments with you, which are detailed in our [2024 Annual Report](#).

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the fiscal year 2026 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.

MCSS should comment on the reasons for reverted and canceled school safety grant program funds.

- \$3,784,055 out of \$10.0 million, or 37.8%, in special funds for SRO grants.

In fiscal year 2024, MCSS awarded approximately \$6.2 million out of \$10.0 million to twenty jurisdictions who applied for the SRO Adequate Coverage grant, closing the fiscal year with an unspent balance of \$3.8 million, with canceled funds returning to the Safe Schools Fund. While the amount awarded in fiscal year 2024 was significantly more than in prior years, the unobligated balances are statutorily required to be cancelled and returned to the Fund at the end of the fiscal year. In

fiscal year 2024, four jurisdictions did not apply. Of those four, three were due to local budget funding for the same purpose. MCSS did not receive a response from the fourth jurisdiction. Additionally, two of the twenty jurisdictions that did apply for the grant, requested less than half of their full allocation to supplement their local budget for the SRO program. All these factors contributed to \$3.8 million in SRO Grant program funds that were cancelled and returned to the Fund in FY2024.

- \$103,030 out of \$600,000, or 17.2%, in special funds for the SSF grant;

Each local education agency is allocated \$25,000 in the Safe Schools Fund Grant (SSFG). Of the twenty four LEAs, four LEAs did not submit an application for the SSFG in fiscal year 2024. Their unobligated allocations were returned to the Safe Schools Fund.

- \$60,901 out of \$3.0 million, or 0.2%, in general funds for the Hate Crimes Grant (HCG).

MCSS awarded the full \$3.0 million in the Hate Crimes Grant. After awards were made, one grantee rescinded their full award and several grantees' reimbursement invoices were slightly less than their initially estimated project amount.

MCSS should comment on the reasons for underspending for the SRO program in fiscal 2023 and 2024 and reasons for the growing SSF balances.

It is true that in prior fiscal years, the SRO grant was not fully utilized by all twenty-four local education agencies. We have received two primary reasons as to why LEAs may not have applied for the SRO grant. First, the SRO Grant does not allow supplanting and some local jurisdictions decide budget appropriations for SROs sooner than the grant becomes available. Second, some jurisdictions have contractual agreement challenges with the law enforcement agencies within their jurisdiction. Thus, jurisdictions forgoing their full allocations and the accruing interest, create the growing balance in the Safe Schools Fund.

MCSS has been working closely with LEAs and local law enforcement agencies to provide technical assistance for their SRO Adequate Coverage grant applications. That work has shown improvement in the number of applications received. For example, in fiscal year 2023, nineteen out of the twenty-four jurisdictions applied for the SRO Adequate Coverage grant program. In fiscal year 2024, twenty out of the twenty-four jurisdictions applied for the SRO Adequate Coverage grant.

Importantly, changes in fiscal year 2025, will drastically reduce the amount of funding going back into the Safe Schools Fund. When established, the SRO Grant fund was restricted to solely fund SRO salaries and adequate coverage; however, Senate Bill 1077 (2024) now allows for the SRO Grant to also be used for School Security Employees (SSEs), in addition to SROs. This has resulted in a significant increase in the FY2025 SRO Adequate Coverage Grant application amounts, which currently stand at \$8.9 million; with twenty-two out of the twenty-four jurisdictions applying for the grant.

MCSS will continue outreach efforts to the LEAs that did not apply for the SRO Adequate Coverage grant in FY2025. By working closely with these LEAs, we hope to identify and resolve any concerns or challenges they might have concerning the grant program.

Operating Budget Recommended Actions

2. Report on Accounting Practices: The committees request that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) submit a closeout report by October 1, 2025.

MCSS concurs.

8. Reduce general funds to the Maryland Center for School Safety for the School Resource Officer grant program by \$5.0 million. This reduction will be backfilled with special funds from the Safe Schools Fund balance.

MCSS concurs.

9. Add the following language to the special fund appropriation:
\$5,000,000 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.

MCSS concurs.