

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5514

As Passed House:
April 10, 2019

Title: An act relating to first responder agency notifications to schools regarding potential threats.

Brief Description: Concerning first responder agency notifications to schools regarding potential threats.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Padden, Wellman, Zeiger and Frockt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Public Safety: 3/18/19, 3/26/19 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/10/19, 92-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires first responder agencies to notify certain schools, including private schools, in certain circumstances where a threat reasonably necessitates an evacuation or lockdown.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Goodman, Chair; Davis, Vice Chair; Klippert, Ranking Minority Member; Sutherland, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Graham, Lovick, Orwall, Pellicciotti and Pettigrew.

Staff: Kelly Leonard (786-7147).

Background:

School Safety Plans and Drills. Public schools with any of grades kindergarten through twelve (K–12) are required to adopt and implement safe school plans to address disaster prevention, intervention, all hazard/crisis response, and post-crisis recovery. As part of the

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plans, public schools are required to regularly practice three basic functional drills: shelter-in-place; lockdown; and evacuation. First, a shelter-in-place drill limits the exposure of students and staff to hazardous materials by isolating the inside environment from the outside environment. Second, a lockdown drill isolates students and staff from threats of violence, such as suspicious trespassers or armed intruders, that may occur in a school or in the vicinity of the school. Lastly, an evacuation drill moves students and staff away from threats, such as fires and tsunamis.

The 2018 Supplemental Operating Budget included funding for the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide grants to educational service districts and school districts to develop or expand regional programs to address student safety. At a minimum, programs must implement a multitier threat assessment system; develop a process for notifying schools, including private schools, of safety emergencies; and make recommendations or implement appropriate safety technology consistent with regional needs.

First Responder Mapping Information System. When funded, the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) must operate the mapping system. The mapping system provides information to emergency first responders, such as emergency operating procedures, response plans, and known hazards. Schools and other government-owned buildings occupied by state or local government employees must be mapped when funding is provided by the WASPC or from other sources. Implementation of safe school plans must be consistent with the mapping system, and use of the mapping system is required in at least one school safety drill each year.

Incident Command System. The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized management tool for meeting the demands of small or large emergency or nonemergency situations. When the ICS is activated, the incident commander is responsible for all aspects of an emergency response, including quickly developing incident objectives, managing all incident operations, and applying and allocating resources. School principals must be certified on the ICS.

Summary of Bill:

If a first responder agency notifies a K–12 public or private school of a situation that may necessitate an evacuation or lockdown, the agency must determine if other schools in the vicinity are similarly threatened. The first responder agency must notify every other known public and private K–12 school in the vicinity of which an evacuation or lockdown appears reasonably necessary to the agency's incident commander, unless the agency is unable to notify schools due to duties directly tied to responding to the incident occurring.

A first responder agency and its officers, agents, and employees are not liable for any act, or failure to act, regarding this requirement unless a first responder agency and its officers, agents, and employees acted with willful disregard.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There were certain school notification requirements in the 2017–19 State Omnibus Operating Appropriations Act, but this bill makes those changes permanent.

The bill addresses the safety of students and staff at public and private schools by requiring first responders to provide notice to those schools in certain circumstances. Many school administrators are surprised to learn that these requirements are not currently in place—this ignorance places lives at risk.

While it is common practice for first responders to notify public schools of threats and other emergencies, this is not the case with private schools. Private schools are typically not included in the mapping system. There have been numerous incidents where threats warranted lockdowns but private schools were left without notice. Private schools are relying on receiving notice from employees working at neighboring public schools, and in some instances, private schools are forced to guess what to do based off of news reports and the proximity of helicopters in the area. These incidents have involved active shooters and other threats. This defies reason. Private schools should be afforded the same courtesy as public schools.

This is not a partisan issue—this is about the safety of children. Stakeholders worked diligently in developing this legislation. It is supported by law enforcement and schools, and it will help to solidify partnerships between first responders and schools.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Padden, prime sponsor; Katie Burns and Perry Sampley, Kennedy Catholic High School; Tim Hunt, Washington State Catholic Conference; Chris Gavin, Saint Patrick Catholic School; and Suzie Hanson, Washington Federation of Independent Schools.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.