

To: Senate Education Committee
From: Falko Schilling, Advocacy Director, ACLU of Vermont
Re: S.138 Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams
Date: 5/5/2023

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Every child deserves to feel safe and included in school, and that happens when students and staff are treated fairly and have access to the resources they need. Behavioral threat assessment team models treat students with suspicion, not support. They also run a serious risk of violating students' due process and privacy rights and perpetuating harmful biases, undermining the very premise of protecting young people in our community.

That is why the ACLU of Vermont strongly opposes mandating behavioral threat assessment teams in Vermont's schools, districts, and supervisory unions as envisioned in S.138 as passed by the House Committee. Instead, we urge leaders to advance trauma-informed, evidence-based practices and support for young people in our community.

Behavioral threat assessment teams are at best a questionable approach to advancing school safety because of the significant potential for due process and privacy violations, the risk of discriminatory profiling as outlined by the National Disability Rights Network, and the disparate harm marginalized students face in unnecessary law enforcement interactions and existing school discipline models. Although we appreciate the guardrails and reporting requirements included in the latest draft of S.138, we are deeply troubled by the decision to require every school in Vermont to implement this model.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to reject any mandate for behavioral threat assessment teams, and begin gathering data about their prevalence and efficacy in Vermont schools.

Sincerely,

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