

TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education
Respectfully Submitted by: **Dee Barbic**, M. Ed., Director of Violence Prevention
Subject: **DR 23-0756 – School Safety**
Date: March 17, 2023

First, I appreciate the time the committee has taken on the important issue of school safety and my apologies for not being able to attend this afternoon's committee hearing. However, I want to present concerns over the proposed language edits that were discussed during yesterday's testimony related to Section 4 of the School Safety bill. I would like to take the opportunity to reiterate that the Administration does not support the most recent suggestions and language the committee is considering regarding Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams.

I want to clarify as I have in past testimony that having law enforcement part of Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams (BTAT) does not mean that schools or districts will be required to have School Resource Officers (SRO). There are few SROs in Vermont, and this is not a requirement that schools adopt an SRO program. It does ensure that law enforcement officers that are part of a BTAT receive the same training as the other members of the team, and that when a particular incident rises to the level of a criminal offense, law enforcement can be brought in for that assessment.

It is also important to note that threat assessments serve to identify and manage threatening behaviors and distinguish between making a threat and posing a threat which is a critical distinction. The process helps schools to develop a plan to address the situation with the goal of providing support and resources to the student or individual of concern. That can include a variety of options to include mental health support, emotional support, educational support or other options that will best meet the needs of the individual, which is why the multidisciplinary team approach is important.

I want to emphasize that the threat assessment process is one that is aligned with national best practices in prevention of school violence. There was discussion yesterday about changing the name of Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams to School Safety Teams. This is not recommended as the two entities are different in makeup and purpose. Using the names interchangeably creates confusion and does not align best practices.

In terms of the conversation yesterday regarding applying section 4 only to schools or districts that already have an existing BTAT - this does not meet the goal of ensuring that all schools in our state have the same level of preparedness. It is important that we take steps to ensure that all of our



schools are as well prepared as possible and that is met with the draft language we provided in section 4.

I appreciate the committee's consideration of these concerns. We understand that the committee will make decisions today and move the bill forward. We are looking forward to continued conversation with you and your House colleagues as the bill moves through the legislative process.