Maryland Association of Boards of Education  
Charles McDaniels, President  
Statement to the Federal Commission on School Safety  
On the Optimal Federal Role in Enhancing School Safety and Security  
August 14, 2018

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all 24 local boards of education, and Maryland’s nearly 900,000 public school students, I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the appropriate and optimal roles for the federal government in enhancing school safety and security. MABE holds school safety and security as extremely important to the protection of students and staff and essential to providing environments conducive to teaching and learning. Our students deserve nothing less.

MABE fully supports the primary objectives of Maryland’s wide array of school safety related laws and programs. Therefore, MABE firmly believes that there is a meaningful and optimal federal role in supporting these efforts by providing technical assistance and significant funding to support state and local implementation of school safety and security measures.

MABE recommends a federal school safety and security policy that focuses on providing informational and financial resources for states and local school systems to provide high quality school safety programs. MABE firmly believes that local boards of education are best situated, within the context of state level oversight, to invest resources to meet local school safety needs. Therefore, MABE believes the optimal role for federal support for school safety is through grant funded initiatives that provide state and local discretion and which are not conditioned on adopting any uniform programs or strategies.

Only weeks after the mass school shooting on Feb. 14, 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, a tragic school shooting occurred on March 20, 2018 at Great Mills High School in St. Mary’s County, Maryland. While Maryland’s local boards of education have long been focused on school safety and security, these school shootings steeled our resolve to work collaboratively on consensus-based solutions.

In the spring of 2018, in the final week of our 90-day legislative session, Maryland enacted the Safe to Learn Act to establish a comprehensive framework for school safety and security by:

- Establishing a School Safety Subcabinet and an Advisory Board;
- Increasing funding for programs, staff, and regional locations for the Maryland Center on School Safety (MCSS);
- Requiring local assessment teams for the identification of, and intervention with, students or other individuals who may pose a threat to school safety;
- Requiring school systems to designate a certified school safety coordinator;
- Requiring local school systems to designate a mental health services coordinator.
- Requiring school systems to conduct annual safety evaluations of each school;
• Requiring all school resource officers (SROs) and school safety and other security personnel to complete a specialized curriculum;
• Requiring school systems to report annually on those schools with assigned SROs and, if not, how adequate local law enforcement will be provided; and
• Incorporating active shooter preparedness training in the annual schedule of school safety drills.

Today the Safe to Learn Act is calling on all Maryland school systems to assess 1,400 schools for safety improvements, establish behavioral threat assessment teams and response strategies, increase the numbers of SROs and school security staff, and strive to meet the new expectation to ensure that our students receive necessary mental health services. MABE recommends the consideration of increased federal funding to support the types of programs and services included in this recently enacted law.

Maryland’s local boards recognize that the State is providing substantial funding to assist in school facility security upgrades, support the expansion of the numbers of SROs provided by local law enforcement agencies, and to support system-wide assessments. However, much more work, and much greater investments, are needed to implement meaningful reforms in access to high quality mental health services to benefit students, families and communities.

In addition, MABE requests consideration of increased federal funding for the types of programs Maryland has adopted to positively impact student behavior and the quality of our schools as safe places conducive to student learning for all students. Maryland has a strong track record of enacting and implementing laws requiring state and local school system policies and programs in areas such as bullying, gangs, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs, progressive discipline, restorative justice programs, and reducing disproportionality in student discipline. MABE believes all of these programs deserve the support of substantial federal funding.

In conclusion, MABE urges the federal government, in conjunction with state and local governments, to build and sustain adequate and equitable funding for local public school safety and security programs, capital improvements, alternative education programs, and the wide array of mental health and public safety services provided by other public and private entities. These programs and services are essential to maintaining safe and secure schools and access to a high quality education for all of Maryland’s students. The optimal role of providing additional federal funding would be to ensure that school safety measures are separately funded and to avoid the shifting of limited resources away from teaching and learning.

MABE greatly appreciates the commitment of the Federal Commission on School Safety and the U.S. Department of Education to soliciting and taking into consideration the input of local boards of education as you develop federal policies and funding initiatives to support improvements in school safety, security and student well-being. MABE looks forward to continuing to assist the Department and Commission in this important work.