



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Subcommittee Chairman Doanld M. Payne, Jr. (D-NJ)

Engaging the Community: Perspectives on School Security

September 26, 2019

The Subcommittee is meeting to discuss community perspectives on school safety, and how the Federal government can better support local stakeholders in making our children safer. I thank the witnesses for participating in today's hearing. Ms. Lauren Hogg and Mr. Max Schachter's testimonies are ones the American public needs to hear and ones that members of Congress should take to heart as we go about our work. A special thank you to you both for sharing your experience with us. I am glad this hearing can build upon the school security field hearing this Subcommittee held last year in New Jersey. The 2019-2020 school year is well underway, and our kids are at-risk from violence every day. As a parent of triplets, all too often I watch the news and I am terrified by what I see and hear.

Tragically, school violence has taken the lives of too many American children and educators. Now, 20 years since the Columbine High School massacre, which left 13 victims dead, our children are still incredibly vulnerable while attending school. Since Columbine and even before, our nation has been rocked by a tragic cycle of school shootings. The 2012 Sandy Hook shooting left a staggering 20 children and six adults dead, yet Congress fell short of passing legislation to combat gun violence in schools. In 2018, there were 24 shootings in K-12 schools around the country, including the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida that left 14 children and 3 teachers dead, and the shooting at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas that claimed 10 victims. The threats to our students continue. During the first half of 2019, there were 22 school shootings. Just last week, a teenager was arrested in Washington state for planning to attack a school on the 21st anniversary of Columbine. Still, the response from the Trump Administration and the Republican-controlled Senate has been wholly inadequate. After Parkland, Congress passed the STOP School Violence Act to provide funds for schools looking to improve their safety infrastructure. However, it is important to remember that school infrastructure is only one part of the solution to keep our children safe – more must be done. In 2018, 113 people were killed in school shootings in the U.S. In the same year, at least 1,200 children were killed by gun violence around the country. Gun violence must be addressed both inside and outside of schools to really improve the safety of children in America.

We cannot truly improve safety for children until we address these threats, regardless of where they happen. That is why the Democratic-controlled House has passed or moved multiple pieces of legislation aimed at making our children, and our country, safer, including universal background checks and grants for states who use red flag laws. Additionally, I am proud that on April 1, 2019, the House passed my bill, the CLASS Act, which would establish a council within DHS to ensure the Department coordinates its school safety activities. I hope the Senate will finally act on these measures, as the American public awaits a meaningful Congressional response. Like the Senate, the Trump Administration has failed to consider serious solutions to address school safety. Last year, the Administration's Federal Commission on School Safety published a report that included no new proposals for Federal policy or funding to make schools safer. Instead, it promoted arming school personnel, a policy that both student and education groups oppose.

Perhaps the only positive outcome from the Commission's work was the decision to establish a Federal school safety clearinghouse, which the Department of Homeland Security is leading along with the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services. This Committee will be following the roll out of the clearinghouse later this year. I am interested to hear from the witnesses how such a tool might be useful to them in their work to improve school safety. Our children are experiencing a new normal, and one that troubles me. Active shooter drills are the new normal in schools, and while I recognize the importance of them, I am saddened that our country has come to a place where they are necessary. We must do more to ensure that school violence, and shootings, are a thing of the past, and our kids feel safe when learning. We must do more to protect the next generation. This country, communities like the ones I serve, and our kids are counting on us. Citizens from across the country are speaking loudly about the need for progress on this subject matter and we must do our best to respond.

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