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Special Legislative Study Commission to Evaluate  
and Provide Recommendations on Mandated Safety  
Protocols for Rhode Island Schools

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Final Report

Submitted March 1, 2024

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### Commission Members\*

- Representative Jennifer Boylan, Chair – D – District 66, Barrington, East Providence
- Representative Joseph M. McNamara, Vice Chair – D – District 19, Cranston, Warwick
- Representative Jennifer A. Stewart, – D – District 59, Pawtucket
- Mr. Glenn Valentine, Public School Teacher
- Mr. Andy Andrade, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Mr. Lawrence P. Filippelli, Ed.D., Rhode Island School Superintendents Association
- Mr. Francis J. Flynn, Rhode Island Chapter of the American Federation of Teachers
- Ms. Amy Mullen, Rhode Island Chapter of the National Education Association
- Ms. Sherrie Monaco, Rhode Island Association of School Psychologists
- Mr. Edward Troiano, Rhode Island Attorney General’s Office
- Ms. Jennifer Ahlijanian, National Association of Social Workers, Rhode Island Chapter
- Chief Scott Kettelle, Rhode Island Association of Fire Chiefs, Inc.
- Ms. Katelyn Medeiros, Esq., Office of the Rhode Island Child Advocate
- Mr. Dexter Vincent, Rhode Island Urban High School Student
- Ms. Millie Piper, Rhode Island Suburban High School Student
- Ms. Amanda Soave-Curi, Rhode Island Public School Special Needs Educator
- Chief Kevin M. Lynch, Rhode Island Police Chiefs’ Association
- Lieutenant Nicholas Rivello, Rhode Island State Police
- Mr. Michael Hassell, Rhode Island Association of School Principals

***\*NOTE: The Commission staff attempted several times to contact the Rhode Island Parent Teacher Association but was unsuccessful in that effort. Accordingly, the Commission does not include a representative from that organization.***

Dear Speaker Shekarchi:

I am pleased to provide you with the findings and recommendations of the Special Legislative Study Commission to Evaluate and Provide Recommendations on Mandated Safety Protocols for Rhode Island Schools (the “*Commission*”).

This nineteen (19) member Commission included dedicated professionals from various fields, including education advocates, students, parents, teachers, and first responders.

The Commission was convened to determine what changes, if any, need to be made to Rhode Island General Law §16-21-4 in light of the national landscape of school shootings as well as recent swatting events.

Accordingly, the Commission heard related testimony, and studied written testimony, from the following sources that provided various perspectives regarding the aforementioned issue: the Rhode Island Police Chief’s Association, the Rhode Island School Principals Association, the Rhode Island Superintendents Association, school teachers, the National Education Association Rhode Island, school resource officers, the Rhode Island State Police, the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, a Pediatric Surgeon and researcher from Massachusetts General Hospital, a Professor of Criminology from Northeastern University, the Rhode Island Fusion Center, and Legal Counsel for the Rhode Island House of Representatives.

This final report is a culmination of seven (7) hearings that began in September, 2023 and ended in February, 2024. It contains information presented by various witnesses who testified before the Commission, as well as presentations made, which the Commission has studied.

I would like to express my gratitude to all members of the Commission for their willingness to take part in these discussions and we appreciate the investment of the time and talent that they graciously provided.

Sincerely,



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Representative Jennifer Boylan  
Chair

### **Commission Findings\***

The Commission studied issues related to school safety drills (lockdown, fire, and evacuation drills) and swatting and, based on testimony and material presented to it, and discussions by and amongst its members, the Commission was presented with the following information:

1. The overall purpose of school safety drills is to ensure that students, staff, teachers, administrators, and the entire school community are prepared in the event of a crisis.
2. No Rhode Island state statute requires parental notification of an upcoming lockdown drill nor debriefing after the fact for students and teachers.
3. According to Legal Counsel for the Rhode Island House of Representatives, David Gilligan, Esq.:
  - Nationwide, 95% of public schools drill students on lockdown procedures, and forty (40) states requiring these drills by statute, including Rhode Island.
  - Despite near universal adoption of lockdown drills, there is limited standardization or nationally recognized best practices that provide guidance for decisionmakers.
  - Thirty-two (32) states require the creation of a school safety plan, twenty-eight (28) states require that law enforcement take part in developing the required plan, seventeen (17) states require that law enforcement participate in the performance of drills, and sixteen (16) states and the District of Columbia require the performance of safety audits by security experts.
  - The states of Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, and Minnesota allow students, and parents on behalf of their children, to opt-out of lockdown drills.
  - Massachusetts requires that municipalities adopt emergency plans and Massachusetts fire codes require that schools conduct four drills per year, at least one of them being a multi-hazard drill.
  - Connecticut schools conduct monthly fire drills but mandate that a crisis response drill be substituted for a fire drill once every three (3) months.
4. According to Chief Kevin M. Lynch of the Rhode Island Police Chiefs' Association:
  - The Rhode Island School Safety Committee established by Rhode Island General Laws § 16-21-23 is responsible for:
    - Establishing best practices on school safety;
    - Providing trainings and professional development;
    - Performing School Site Surveys (every 3 years); and

### **Commission Findings (continued)**

- Assisting school districts with school crisis plans, lockdown drills, and evacuation drills.
  - The Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association safety report card is a standard adopted for use by local school departments and school resource officers to evaluate the safety conditions and procedures in Rhode Island schools.
  - Chief Lynch provided written recommendations on behalf of the Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association, dated January 4, 2024, to the Commission, and these recommendations are included herein at the end of Appendix C.
5. According to Amy Mullen of the National Educators Association of Rhode Island:
- Nationally, in the 2021-2022 school year there were 193 incidents of gunfire on the grounds of preschools and K-12 schools;
  - That is up significantly from an average of 49 incidents in every school year since 2013;
  - A study by the Georgia Institute of Technology's Social Dynamics and Wellbeing Lab analyzed students' social media posts ninety (90) days before and ninety (90) days after lockdown drills and analyzed 54 million social media posts, both pre and post drills in 114 schools spanning 33 states; this study found that depression in those students increased by thirty-nine percent (39%), anxiety & stress increased by forty percent (40%), and trauma & collective worry increased by forty-two percent (42%).
6. According to James Alan Fox, Ph.D, Professor of Criminology from Northeastern University:
- With respect to national and local risks of school shootings:
    - In the past twenty (20) years, Rhode Island has experienced five (5) school shootings resulting in three (3) fatalities, none of which occurred inside any schools nor during school hours.
    - Nationally, over two (2) in five (5) parents report being concerned about their child's safety at school.
  - With respect to lockdown drills, twelve (12) states require one (1) drill, twelve (12) states require two (2) drills, four (4) states require three (3) drills, three (3) states require four (4) drills, and two (2) states require five (5) drills.
  - Age appropriate lockdown drill training does not necessarily help prevent or manage trauma associated with drills.

### **Commission Findings (continued)**

- Dr. Fox was in concurrence with the study by the Georgia Institute of Technology's Social Dynamics and Wellbeing Lab, previously presented by Amy Mullen and stated that he is aware of no conclusive evidence of the effectiveness of lockdown drills.
  - Dr. Fox provided a chart showing a 50-year trend in fatal shootings and fatalities at K-12 US schools which shows that school shootings have been happening consistently in the US for 50 years, peaking in the 1990s. More recent mass school shootings with high number of fatalities (Uvalde, Sandy Hook, Parkland, Sante Fe) have resulted in “an epidemic of fear”.
7. According to a survey that went out to over four hundred (400), Rhode Island school principals, of which one hundred and forty-five (145) responded, conducted by the Rhode Island Association of School Principals with respect to current drilling practices:
- Emergency operations procedures in Rhode Island schools are standardized and consistent throughout the individual school districts and 86% of school principals surveyed supported statewide standardization of drilling practices.
  - 64% of principals supported changing the number of fire, evacuation, or lockdown drills required by Rhode Island General Laws §16-21-4.
  - 67% of principals opposed providing parents and guardians with advance notice as to when lockdown drills would be conducted.
  - 73% of principals opposed providing either parents or students with prior notice that lockdown drill are, in fact, drills.
  - 82% of principals agreed that schools should create age and developmentally appropriate lockdown drill content with the involvement of school personnel, including school-based mental health professionals.
  - 59% of principals reported that their schools conduct “debriefs” after emergency drills to address any potential trauma that may have affected staff or students.
8. According to Dr. Lawrence Filippelli of the Rhode Island School Superintends Association and Andy Andrade of the Rhode Island Department of Education:
- Drills are often timed by the building principal so that efforts can be made to get the entire building evacuated and to safety in an orderly manner;
  - There are designated evacuation locations for each classroom for accountability purposes;
  - There is typically an accountability process in place so that administrators will know that all students are accounted for (green card/red card, electronic methods, accountability attendance sheets, etc.);

### Commission Findings (continued)

- Drills are reviewed by district crisis response teams and changes are made to increase efficiency as necessary;
  - A survey conducted by the Rhode Island School Superintendents Association of all superintendents of Rhode Island school districts found that:
    - **Active shooter simulation drills**, which include traumatizing elements such as the sounds of live gunfire, are **not** conducted in the presence of students in any school district in Rhode Island but are not prohibited by any state law.
    - Lockdown drills are conducted in Rhode Island schools to train students, teachers, staff, and administrators to protect school building occupants from potential dangers and/or hazards in the building **without incorporating traumatizing elements in a simulation.**
9. According to Lieutenant Nicholas Rivello of the Rhode Island State Police:
- Swatting is the act of making a prank call to emergency services in an attempt to bring about the dispatch of a large number of armed police officers to a particular address or location.
  - The Rhode Island State Fusion Center (the “RISFC”) is Rhode Island’s primary intelligence and information-sharing center and relays information to partners such as Student Resource Officers, Superintendents, and the Rhode Island Department of Education.
  - RISFC is under the oversight of the Rhode Island State Police, is co-located with the FBI’s Providence office, and is directly linked to the National Fusion Center Association, a robust network connecting 80 Fusion Centers nationwide.
10. According to Peter Pogacar MD, of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics:
- It is necessary to keep children as safe as possible at school and drills are an essential part of the task.
  - Standardized goals and best practices for lockdown drills are **not** well-documented nationally.
  - Based on the American Academy of Pediatrics September 2020 Policy Statement, Dr. Pogacar opined that Rhode Island school children should not be involved in high intensity drills, and that we should prohibit deception in drills and exercises, and ensure appropriate accommodations during drills based on children’s unique vulnerabilities. [NOTE: The Commission is not aware of the participation of any Rhode Island school children in active shooter simulation drills.]



### **Commission Findings (continued)**

**11.** According to Cornelia Griggs, MD, a Pediatric Surgeon at the Massachusetts General Hospital:

- Gun violence became the leading cause of death among children and adolescents in the US in 2020.
- While only 0.2% of gun deaths a year occur on school grounds, drills to prepare students and staff have become a near-universal practice.
- There is an appropriate balance that needs to be reached between the risk of violence and the risk of trauma.
- Nationally there have been 389 school shootings since Columbine.
- Based on data in an article in the Washington Post, Dr. Griggs opined that school shootings disproportionately affect children of color who are more than twice as likely to experience campus gun violence than white children.
- The median age of the average school shooter is only sixteen (16) years old and are typically perpetrated by current or former students of the school that is targeted.
- There is almost no research affirming the value of lockdown drills for prevention or protection.
- Existing drills do not take into consideration students' ages, developmental stages, special health care needs, disabilities, or learning challenges.

***\*NOTE: Commission Findings do not necessarily reflect the views of individual Commission members or the Commission as a whole.***

### Commission Recommendations\*

Based on its study of school safety drills and swatting as well as related testimony and material presented to it, and discussions by and amongst its members, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

The General Assembly may consider enacting legislation that would:

1. Amend Rhode Island General Law §16-21-4 to define critical terms that will be used in proposed legislation, including, but not limited to “lockdown drill”, “active shooter drill”, “active shooter simulation drill”, “debrief”, “age-appropriate educational material”, “shelter in place”, “restricted movement lockdown drill”, and “law enforcement lockdown drill”.
2. With regard to “***active shooter simulation drills***”, which **are not required under Rhode Island state law**, and differ from “***lockdown drills***” in that active shooter simulation drills incorporate traumatizing elements such as the sound of live gunfire to mimic an actual school shooting, the Commission recommends that:
  - a. Active shooter simulation drills will be prohibited from being conducted while students are present in the school building.
  - b. When staff and students are **not** present in a school building, law enforcement officials will be allowed to conduct active shooter simulation drills in that school building.
  - c. Include trauma-informed approaches to address the well-being of school staff who volunteer to participate in active shooter simulation drills.
3. With regard to “***lockdown drills***”, which are conducted to train students, teachers, staff, and administrators to protect school building occupants from potential dangers in or near the building **without incorporating traumatizing elements in a simulation**, the Commission recommends that:
  - a. Parents and guardians be informed at the beginning and end of any lockdown drill through the normal channels of school-community communication which may include text, email, phone call, or written notices (Note: Most commission members favored advanced parental notification prior to the lockdown drill.);
  - b. Lockdown drills be announced over the school public announcement system at the beginning and end of any lockdown drill and clearly identified as a drill;
  - c. The Rhode Island School Safety Committee, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Education, develop guidelines for age and developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed lockdown drills;
  - d. The Rhode Island School Safety Committee shall create age and developmentally appropriate lockdown drill policies based on the guidelines from the Rhode Island Department of Education;

### **Commission Recommendations (continued)**

- e. Lockdown drill policies be developed with the involvement of school personnel, including school-based mental health professionals, and law enforcement;
  - f. Debriefs shall be made available after every actual lockdown event with access to school mental health professionals as needed;
  - g. The Rhode Island School Safety Committee in conjunction with the Rhode Island Department of Education develop guidelines in order to accommodate special needs students and students with specific trauma triggers during drills and actual emergency events. Accommodations may include alternative learning in place of a lockdown drill so that select students receive essential information, training and instruction through a less sensorial method; and
  - h. The Rhode Island School Safety Committee in conjunction with the Rhode Island Department of Education develop age appropriate training that addresses evacuation options.
4. Require that all new school staff to be trained in lockdown drill procedures as part of new staff orientation.
  5. Require that new school construction includes security measures that aid in preventing unauthorized entrance and protects against potential threats.

***\*NOTE: The Commission discussed and studied the issues regarding the frequency of drills referenced in Rhode Island General Law §16-21-4 and whether parents or guardians may be allowed to withhold their children's participation in such drills. However, the Commission was not able to arrive at a consensus with respect to those issues.***

**Appendix A - Resolution**

**2023 -- H 6422**

(See attached)

## **Appendix B - Meeting Agendas**

- **September 6, 2023**
  - Agenda (See attached)
- **October 10, 2023**
  - Agenda (See attached)
- **October 25, 2023**
  - Agenda (See attached)
- **November 8, 2023**
  - Agenda (See attached)
- **December 11, 2023**
  - Agenda (See attached)
- **January 22, 2024**
  - Agenda (See attached)
- **February 5, 2024**
  - Agenda (See attached)

## **Appendix C - Written Testimony, Material, and Presentations**

**(These documents have been posted in the “Safety Protocols for Schools” section of the Commissions tab of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website:**

**<https://www.rilegislature.gov>)**

- 1.** 1-4-24---Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association Letter to the Commission
- 2.** 12-11-2023---Daphne Meredith Testimony
- 3.** 12-11-2023---Emma Elias Testimony
- 4.** 12-11-2023---Sherri Simmons Testimony
- 5.** 12-11-2023---50 State Comparison of School Safety Drills
- 6.** 12-11-2023---50 State Comparison of School Safety Plans
- 7.** 12-11-2023---Dan Marion Testimony
- 8.** 12-11-2023---Lindsay Elias Testimony
- 9.** 12-11-2023---RI Kids Count Testimony
- 10.** 11-8-2023---Amy Herlihy Testimony
- 11.** 11-8-2023---Public Testimony Sign Up Sheet
- 12.** 11-8-2023---Alice Adler Testimony
- 13.** 11-8-2023---RIDE and Superintendents Association Presentation
- 14.** 11-8-2023---Dr. Fox Biography
- 15.** 11-8-2023---Dr. Fox Presentation
- 16.** 10-25-2023---RISFC Swatting Presentation
- 17.** 10-25-2023---Dr Griggs Presentation
- 18.** 10-10-2023--- RINEA Amy Mullen Presentation
- 19.** 10-10-2023---Dr. Pogacar Presentation Safety Drills in Rhode Island Schools
- 20.** 10-10-2023---K-2 Code Red Lockdown Digital Book
- 21.** 10-10-2023---RIPCA Safety Checklist Template
- 22.** 10-10-2023---2023-2024 Code Red Drill Schedule Elementary 3-5
- 23.** 10-10-2023---2023-2024 Code Red Drill Schedule Secondary Schools
- 24.** 10-10-2023---Armed-Assailant-Guide-National-Association-School-Psychologists
- 25.** 10-10-2023---RIPCA - School Safety Protocols

**Appendix C - Written Testimony, Material, and Presentations (continued)**

26. 10-10-2023---Participation of Children and Adolescents in Live Crisis Drills  
and Exercises
27. 10-10-2023---Principal Survey Special Legislative Study Commission  
Responses
28. 10-10-2023---Reunification K-12 July 2021 PowerPoint
29. 10-10-2023---Mike Hassell RI Principal Presentation
30. 9-6-2023---R.I. Gen. Laws 16-21-4
31. 9-6-2023---H-6422