



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES & PUBLIC PROTECTION
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

March 12, 2019

Good morning, Senator Bradley, Representative Verrengia, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. I am Brenda Bergeron from the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP). Thank you for the opportunity to comment on H.B. 7291 An Act Concerning School Security. The Department appreciates the intention behind this bill and would like to highlight the work currently undertaken by DESPP and the Department of Education with regard to the school security and safety plan standards.

Section 1 amends CGS Section 10-222n to require DESPP, in consultation with the Department of Education, to evaluate and update the school security and safety plan standards, starting January 1, 2020 and every three years thereafter. The section also requires the Department of Education to distribute the standards to all public schools within the state.

Currently, CGS Section 10-222n(b) requires DESPP to submit the school security and safety plan standards to the Public Safety and Education Committees of the General Assembly each year by January 1st and also to provide any recommendations for legislation regarding such standards.

In order to implement this statute, DESPP/ Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) conducts an evaluation of the plan standards each year. DEMHS convenes a school security working group made up of state and local partners and subject matter experts. The group initially drafted the plan standards as well as plan templates that could be used by schools to meet the standards. Each year, the group reviews the standards and plan templates and recommends adjustments, which are made and then submitted to the legislature. The updated standards and plan templates are also sent by the Department of Education to school systems throughout the state.

Section 2 is a new provision that would require DESPP to "evaluate and seek methods to simplify the documentation required from local and regional boards of education to comply with the reporting requirements of CGS Section 10-244m and 10-222n(a)(6)." This new section would require DESPP to submit a report by January 1, 2020 to the Public Safety and Security Committee "identifying the essential components and documentation required for such reports and indicating how the department will simplify the required documentation." The new requirements must be implemented by July 1, 2020.

We believe we have already complied with the intent of this proposed legislation. CGS Section 10-222n(a)(6) is the statutory requirement that local and regional boards of education annually submit reports to DESPP regarding fire drills and crisis response drills. Section 10-222n(a)(5) requires that "local

law enforcement and other local public officials evaluate, score and provide feedback on fire drills and crisis response drills....” DESPP/DEMHS has combined these two requirements into one easy- to- use form. The form is part of the school security and safety plan packet that is provided to towns each year. This year, DEMHS also put out an FAQ to help the local public officials address the requirement that they evaluate the drills. Our recommendation, which was sent to all towns, recognizes that, “while it is of course impossible for every official to attend every drill at every school, it is a best practice to have the town public safety team (fire, police, emergency management, etc.) attend at least one drill per year as a team. That way, team members can share observations and ideas with each other. Then, each individual public safety official can attend a representative sampling of the other drills in the year.” DEMHS has also simplified the process by interpreting the statutory requirement to “score” a drill as a more general requirement to provide an “assessment”.

With regard to simplifying the documentation required under CGS 10-222m, that section requires each local and regional board of education to develop and implement a school safety and security plan for each school in the district. The plan must meet the school security and safety plan standards released by DESPP, which are largely established by statute, and have been developed by the working group of state and local subject matter experts including local school, police, fire, and emergency management officials.

Section 2 of the bill also requires DESPP and the School Safety Infrastructure Council to “evaluate and seek methods to simplify the documentation required of applicants for the school security infrastructure competitive grant program,” and to provide a report on how to simplify the documentation.

DESPP/DEMHS has developed plan templates to assist school systems in complying with 10-222m, but there is no requirement that school systems use the templates. They are meant to assist communities in meeting their statutory obligations, and our DEMHS regional offices provide technical assistance as needed.

The requirements of the School Security Infrastructure Competitive Grant Program are set by Public Act No. 13-3, and incorporated into CGS Section 10-292r(b). The documentation that is required is necessary to comply with the statutory requirements, as well as with standard auditing practice. Almost 2400 schools, both public and private, have been able to apply, with over 1140 schools receiving an award. These statutory requirements are not onerous, as demonstrated by the number of applicants.

Section 3 of the proposed bill requires DESPP to develop criteria to identify qualified school security consultants operating in CT, and then maintain a registry of such qualified consultants.

Currently, CGS Section 29-452 requires DESPP to maintain a registry of school security consultants operating in the state, but does not require the development of criteria. This requirement would potentially increase the state’s liability regarding the work of these consultants and would require additional resources to monitor the qualifications of each registrant.

Thank you and I am prepared to answer any questions you might have.

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