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Testimony of Rep. Rebecca Millett presenting

LD 477, Resolve, Directing the Department of Education, Maine School Safety Center to Convene a Stakeholder Group to Develop Best Practices for Lockdown Drills and Allowing Parents to Opt Out of Lockdown Drills for Their Children

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Millett, and I represent House District 123, which makes up most of Cape Elizabeth. Today, I'm proud to present **LD 477, Resolve, Directing the Department of Education, Maine School Safety Center to Convene a Stakeholder Group to Develop Best Practices for Lockdown Drills and Allowing Parents to Opt Out of Lockdown Drills for Their Children.**

LD 477 does two things:

- First, it directs the Maine School Safety Center at the Department of Education to convene a group that includes law enforcement, education, and health professionals. The stakeholder group would develop a series of best practices for school lockdown drills.
- Second, the bill calls for a rule amendment that would allow parents to opt their children out of lockdown drills.

As the gun violence epidemic continues to plague our nation, it's important that school staff and students are prepared for threats — but it's also crucial that we care for their mental and emotional wellbeing during those preparations. The stakeholder group would work to establish guidelines that protect students and staff from harm while educating them about school safety.

Studies have found that lockdown drills can increase anxiety, fear, and post-traumatic stress symptoms in children. In 2021, researchers from Georgia Tech's Social Dynamics and

Wellbeing Lab analyzed millions of conversations on Twitter and Reddit to determine the impacts of school active shooter drills. They found that the drills are associated with increases in “depression (39%), stress and anxiety (42%), and physiological health problems (23%), including children from as young as five years old up to high schoolers, their parents, and teachers. Concerns over death increased by 22 percent, with words like blood, pain, clinics, and pills becoming a consistent feature of social media posts in school communities in the 90 days after a school drill.”¹ That’s not okay.

We must do all we can to protect our school communities in Maine from gun violence. But we also must do everything in our power to limit harm caused by gun violence drills. These drills should focus on executing procedures, not playing out traumatic scenarios. High-intensity run-throughs that involve weapons, faux gunfire, and shooter cosplay are counterproductive. Deceiving students into believing a threat is real, not fake, is also unacceptable and causes unnecessary trauma. Instead, recent guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends these drills be conducted in a manner similar to that of fire drills.²

The proposed stakeholder group would bring together law enforcement, teaching, counseling, administrative, and pediatric professionals to establish reasonable drill standards for Maine schools. The group would focus on drill effectiveness and pay close attention to limiting potential trauma that these drills could inflict on students and staff.

This bill would also amend DOE rule Chapter 125 to enable particularly vulnerable students to opt out of lockdown drills. According to Professor Jonathan Comer of Florida International University, kids who have already experienced trauma are more likely to be negatively impacted by these drills.³ The proposed change would allow parents to determine their student’s readiness for potentially traumatizing active shooter drills and opt their child out if necessary.

The rise in gun violence incidents across the country has created a culture of fear and uncertainty in many schools. With that context in mind, we must take steps to ensure that active shooter drills make our children feel more safe, not more traumatized.

We all want Maine students to be safe at school and to *feel* safe at school. With this bill, we can do just that. I look forward to working with you to pass this necessary legislation. Thank you.

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills-in-schools/>

² <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/7243/AAP-Schools-should-avoid-high-intensity-live>

³ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/active-shooter-drills-mental-health-kids_I_628e3e39e4b0933e736dca56