

School & Campus Safety Task Force Meeting

September 16, 2013

Task Force Members Present:

The Honorable Marla Graff Decker
The Honorable Laura Fornash
The Honorable Bill Hazel, M.D. (represented by Deputy Secretary Matt Cobb)
The Honorable Kenneth Cuccinelli (represented by Deputy Attorney General John Childrey)
The Honorable Joseph Yost
The Honorable George Barker
Patricia Wright, Ed.D.
Colonel W. Steven Flaherty (represented by Lt. Col. Robert Kemmler)
Donna Michaelis
Garth Wheeler
Michael Cline
James Stewart III
Michelle Wescott
Meg Gruber
Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.
Chief Steve Cover
Edward "Bubby" Bish
Chief Don Challis
Judi Lynch, Ph.D.
Chief Jim Williams
Charles Klink
Captain Steve Carey
Gene Deisinger, Ph.D.
Scott Brabrand
Cynthia Romero, M.D.

The meeting was called to order at 1:00PM by Secretary Decker. A moment of silence was observed for the victims of the Washington D.C. Navy Yard tragedy.

The minutes from the July 31, 2013 Task Force meeting were approved as written. Motion by Garth Wheeler, seconded by Michael Cline. The motion passed unanimously.

The first agenda item was **Discussion Based Upon Previous Presentations.**

Secretary Decker announced this was an opportunity to further discuss/debate the issue of whether legislative changes are necessary relating to firearms in schools, per the presentations made at the last Task Force meeting and the study report prepared by Dr. William Pelfrey.

A motion was made by Lt. Col. Robert Kemmler (Virginia State Police) recommending that there be no changes made to existing laws as they deal with firearms in schools (HB 1557). Existing laws are appropriate and adequate. The motion was seconded by Garth Wheeler.

Delegate Robert Marshall, the Chief Patron of HB 1557, provided a three-page document to Task Force members requesting their endorsement of the bill, or a measure substantially like it. Task Force members were given time to thoroughly review Delegate Marshall's comments prior to any discussion.

After some discussion among Task Force members, the motion by Lt. Col. Kemmler passed unanimously.

Next, Garth Wheeler made a motion recommending an additional \$1.3 million be included in the upcoming budget for the funding of additional School Resource Officer and School Security Officer positions in Virginia Schools (HB 1730/PS-06). Forty-two SRO positions were funded through the 2013 General Assembly original budget amendment of \$1.3 million. However, of the grant requests received, an additional 43 position requests were denied due to a lack of funding. The motion was seconded by Senator Barker.

After some discussion, Senator Barker then recommended the wording be amended to 'at least \$1.3 million,' to keep the funding stream open to an increase if necessary. The amendment was agreed to by Mr. Wheeler and the motion passed unanimously.

Meg Gruber then made a motion based on HB 2277, which defines the SSO position. The revised definition of SSO would require these individuals be retired or former sworn law enforcement personnel, who could then be hired by schools to produce an armed presence on school grounds. Ms. Gruber recommended that the Department of Education, in collaboration with DCJS, the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and the Virginia Sheriffs' Association, establish a committee to further study/examine the concepts behind this legislation before any action is taken. The motion was seconded by Michelle Wescott. After some discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

The next item on the agenda was the discussion of referred legislation from the Task Force's Education, Mental Health and Public Safety Workgroups.

Secretary Fornash explained that the Education Workgroup received a presentation in May on HB 2337 (Del. Kory). The bill was referred to the Work Group by the House Education-Teachers & Admin Action Subcommittee. However, the Work Group felt no need to move forward with a recommendation at this time, and this information has been shared with Del. Kory. HB 2337 directs each local school board to hold and require the parents of each student in the local school division to attend an informational session no later than August 31 of each year, at which the school board shall distribute and present an overview of the school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plan. The bill requires each parent to sign a form to certify that he attended the informational session and received a copy of the plan.

Deputy Secretary Cobb then explained that the Mental Health Work Group had also completed its work.

Secretary Decker then noted there were two new recommendations coming out of the Public Safety Work Group. Dr. Deisinger then made the motion, recommending the formation of a standing School and Campus safety Committee at the gubernatorial level, consisting of members from appropriate state agencies and member selected or nominated by relevant school, campus and law enforcement associations and/or groups. The Committee would be charged with identifying school and campus safety issues, making recommendations based upon best practices in this field, and making legislative recommendations. The Committee would ensure the work and recommendations generated and approved by the 2013 Governor's School and Campus Safety Task Force would be sustained. The Committee would work in concert with the identified state agencies to address necessary improvements needed to keep Virginia schools and campuses as safe as possible through the latest research, best practices and legislative changes. The motion was seconded by Edward 'Bubby' Bish and passed unanimously.

Next was a proposal submitted by Public Safety Work Group member Fred Ellis, which recommends a minor change to *Code of Virginia* §18.2-57. The change is to include the designation of School Security Officers in a class of school employees that warrant enhanced penalties for assault. A motion was made by Garth Wheeler and seconded by Senator Barker to move the recommendation forward. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Cornell then made a recommendation, which was seconded by Meg Gruber, to include other school employees to the designation list that warrants the enhanced penalties, such as school nurses, psychologists, social workers and bus drivers.

Discussion then ensued on including the designation of all school personnel, as to not run the risk of leaving someone out. All school employees should know they are valued.

Dr. Cornell then substituted the previous recommendation, now recommending the change to *Code of Virginia* §18.2-57 include the designation of all school personnel in a class of persons that warrant enhanced penalties for assault. This *Code* section already recognizes principals, assistant principals, teachers and guidance counselors as school employees that, if victimized by assault, justify an enhanced penalty. This recommendation would further strengthen this language to include all school personnel, as defined in §18.2-57 and §9.1-101. Eliminating the separate listing of each role within the school, all school personnel should be viewed as part of this protected class. The motion was seconded by Chief Williams and passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

The meeting concluded at 2:30 PM.