



Testimony of Arielle Frankston-Morris, Director of Teach PA
PA Senate Education Committee
“Public hearing on improving School Safety and keeping students safe”

Good morning,

I am the director of Teach PA, and we represent and organize Jewish day schools across PA. We work in close collaboration with our fellow nonpublic school groups. We stand with all schools, public and nonpublic, at this time.

We would like to encourage the Senate Education Committee to keep all students and teachers in mind as next steps in safety measures are charted. Please note that at-risk campuses, vulnerable due to community make-up, creed, minority or marginalized status, etc., are overwhelmingly concerned. As a representative of Jewish institutions, this hits close to home, as our schools and campuses are consistently vulnerable.

The Jewish population within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania numbers over 300,000. Our communities, while smaller than other Jewish metropolitan areas in the northeast, are active and vibrant. The Pennsylvania Jewish community includes a dynamic representation of all Jewish denominations, ranging from the most liberal to the most conservative. In addition, several thousand Jewish students attend two dozen Jewish day schools located in the greater Philadelphia Area, Pittsburgh, Allentown, Scranton and here in Harrisburg.

Unfortunately, security is not a new concern for Jewish institutions. Around the world, Jewish schools, houses of worship, and community centers have been targets of terror and defamation. Security is of paramount importance to the Jewish community at large in order to protect our way of life and the freedoms we cherish. With increased anti-Semitism this year, with bomb threats to a school in the Philadelphia area and one in Harrisburg, with vandalism at a Philadelphia Jewish cemetery, with neo-Nazi pamphletting near a Jewish school in Pittsburgh...we stand with all schools and communities in the hopes of ensuring safety of students everywhere.

Our community's schools are doing the best they can to make sure they are applying for all the resources available. After each anti-Semitic occurrence or incident of school violence, Jewish schools reassess their plans and procedures and see what they can do to improve and make their schools safer.

Stationing security personnel is a great need. Unfortunately, the cost of keeping a school safe is prohibitive. Some relief is available for our schools located in the greater Philadelphia area and Pittsburgh through the Federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program. This grant provides funds for non-profit organizations located in eligible urban areas to purchase target-hardening equipment such as cameras and door buzzers. Since the program's inception, several Jewish schools in



Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have received the grant, which allowed them to install target-hardening equipment in their schools. But what about the Jewish schools in Allentown, Scranton and Harrisburg? They are equally as vulnerable to anti-Semitism and terror attacks as schools in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. What about all the other nonpublic schools that are located outside the specific eligible urban areas?

Without the proper funding for security equipment or a guard, schools are vulnerable. As the esteemed committee members know, the only source of state funding now available for safety is the Safe Schools targeted grants. While our schools are very thankful for this grant, it is highly competitive, and only a handful of nonpublic schools historically receive the grant each year. Another challenge for schools is that there is no consistency with the grant. Schools need consistency. They need to know that there will be funding on an ongoing basis to help them. Each year they know that funding is available for textbooks. Security should be the same. All schools must be able to provide a safe and secure learning environment for their students.

I would also like to call the committee's attention to the recent proposal of Representative Bill Kortz, whose co-sponsorship memo proposes a \$30 million increase to the Safe School Grant Programs and an adjustment to make the grant annual.

Lastly, I share with you a sampling of programs initiated in a few other states, over the past couple of years, in response to increased hate and violence.

Sampling of Security Funding for Nonpublic Schools

New York:

- Statewide per pupil funding, \$15 million Nonpublic School Safety Equipment program (NPSE). Non-competitive program, amounts to \$35 per pupil.
- Statewide grant opportunity "Securing Communities Against Hate" \$25 million grant program, eligible entities include nonpublic schools, community centers, day care centers, does not include places of worship, \$30,000 target hardening grants.
- New York City grant, \$19.8 million, offering reimbursements for security personnel for nonpublic schools, not highly competitive.

New Jersey:

- Per pupil funding, \$75 per nonpublic school student, that can be used for either personnel or equipment.

Florida:

- \$654,000 for vulnerable nonpublic schools for security equipment.

California:

- \$2 million grant program for nonprofit organizations.

I conclude my testimony by urging the Senate Education Committee to include in its recommendations a statement that schools require ongoing, consistent funding to support a safe and secure learning environment—and that funding may be used for various needs, including



improving school building security and personnel. I also recommend you address the highly selective and bi-annual nature of the grant, to provide greater consistency and opportunity for schools.

Thank you for accepting written testimony.

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