



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew Gounardes

Sen. Gounardes Joins Parents, Advocates and Experts to Rally for More Effective, Trauma-Informed School Lockdown Drills

ANDREW GOUNARDES May 14, 2024

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Albany, NY - New York State Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon joined parents, mental health experts, school safety advocates and other lawmakers

today to rally in support of legislation that would right-size and reform New York's harmful and ineffective approach to school lockdown drills, ensuring true safety for students.

New York State law currently mandates that schools conduct four lockdown drills a year—more than 46 other states. Drills are often conducted without adequate consideration as to whether they are age-appropriate and trauma-informed for students, and whether they do more to frighten students than keep them safe. A [study by Everytown for Gun Safety](#) found that excessive and aggressive lockdown drills contributed to a 42% increase in anxiety and a 39% increase in depression amongst students.

The proposed legislation ([S.6527A-Gounardes/A.6665A-Simon](#)) would right-size the lockdown drill mandate from four per year to two, aligning New York with other states. Schools would have the freedom to conduct more drills if they choose to. The bill also requires that drills be conducted in a trauma-informed, developmentally age-appropriate manner that includes accommodations for students with disabilities, PTSD, and other needs that require extra support; training for teachers; and advanced notice to both school staff and parents that drills will be occurring.

The bill, which reflects nationally-recommended best practices and builds upon [recently-proposed regulations](#) by the New York State Education Department, reflects a national trend to improve lockdown drills. Connecticut, Maine, Minnesota, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Illinois have taken similar steps.

The bill is also supported by a wide range of health experts and gun safety advocates, including Moms Demand Action, New Yorkers Against Gun Violence (NYAGV), Everytown for Gun Safety, Teachers Unify to End Gun Violence, NAMI-NYS, Mental Health Association in New York State, the New York Association of School Psychologists, the New York State School Workers Association, Advocates for Children of New York, March for Our Lives youth

group, the NYS American Academy of Pediatrics and the New York State School Counselor Association.

"Our current approach to school lockdown drills is doing more to traumatize kids than to keep them safe," said **State Senator Andrew Gounardes**. "My proposal incorporates nationally-recognized best practices that right-size the lockdown drill mandate to align New York with other states, and ensure we use a trauma-informed, age-appropriate approach that includes accommodations for students that need extra support. As a father, a New Yorker, and a lawmaker, I'm deeply committed to ensuring our children's schools are truly safe. Reforming our approach to lockdown drills is part of a holistic strategy to make that happen."

"New York has one of the highest lockdown drill mandates in the nation despite the fact that there is almost no research to show that they work. School shooter drills are associated with increased anxiety and depression among schoolchildren, so we are causing students harm and putting the onus on them to stay safe. We must reform our lockdown drills and instead focus on gun violence prevention policies that are grounded in evidence-based research. My bill right-sizes the number of drills while also ensuring that drills are age-appropriate and trauma-informed. I am grateful to the parents and experts who have advocated for these common-sense improvements," said **Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon**.

"As a parent, it's heartbreaking to know my child thinks about danger in her school when she should be focused on learning and making friends," said **Sheffali Welch, NYC Lead of Moms Demand Action**. "While it's important to prepare our children, subjecting them to excessive lockdown drills does more to traumatize than educate them, and evidence of the lasting physical and emotional harms continues to mount. Every step our lawmakers can take to reduce those harms is critical, so I'm grateful to Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Simon for raising this issue and doing something about it."

"As our kids complete another year at school with the fear of gun violence, we need to adopt laws and policies that prevent gun violence and trauma and do not cause more harm," said **Rebecca Fischer, Executive Director of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence**. "When it comes to safety protocols like lockdown drills in our school buildings, it's essential that we prioritize quality over quantity in terms of training, implementation, and trauma-informed services for students and teachers. We commend Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Simon for championing a gun safety bill that will fix the law to better support our kids while ensuring our schools are safe and supportive."

"NAMI-NYS is concerned about the myriad of stressors contributing to the unprecedented mental health crisis impacting New York's future, our youth," said **Matthew Shapiro, Senior Director, Government Affairs at NAMI-NYS**. "We are grateful to Senator Gounardes for being a true leader in addressing many of these issues including reforming the ways schools handle shooting and emergency drills. We are proud to stand alongside Senator Gounardes in calling for a trauma informed approach. While keeping our students safe and prepared is of the utmost importance, ensuring their wellness includes being mindful of the trauma and stress these drills can cause and making sure there is an outlet for students to voice their feelings generated from having to perform these exercises."

"The New York State American Academy of Pediatrics, representing more than 4,000 pediatricians from across the state, is proud to support this proposal to reduce New York's harmful lockdown mandate from 4 to 2," said **Dr. Jeff Kaczorowski, Chair of the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics**. "Passage of this bill will require the more than 700 school districts across our state to standardize and incorporate trauma-informed and age-appropriate lockdown instruction that will protect the mental and physical health and well-being of our students, including those with disabilities. We further believe that teachers and parents working together play a significant role in ensuring children's safety. Passage of this

bill will allow for transparency and engagement of all stakeholders so that the drills are effective and not harmful.”

"Safety and the mental health of our children and the entire school community must be our top priority, especially when addressing the tragedies that have occurred in schools across the nation," said **Glenn Liebman, CEO of Mental Health Association in New York State**. "It's true that school communities must be prepared, but we must ensure that school safety drills are conducted using a common-sense, trauma-informed approach resulting in no harm to our students and school staff. Kudos to Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Simon for introducing S.6537 and A.6665, that will do just that—prepare school communities using school safety drills, yet eliminate harm to our children and school community."

"Recent studies show that lockdown drills are detrimental to our children's mental health," said **Jody Rumfola, Board Member at the New York State School Social Workers' Association**. "Careful consideration should be used in the manner and frequency in which drills are performed. NYSSSWA supports Senator Gounardes' bill reform."

"The system of lockdown drills is in need of dire reform, as children are harmed by such drills when not conducted properly," said **Robert Murtfeld, a public school parent and advocate**. "The frequency of four drills per year is also unmanageable and needs to be drastically lowered. The pressure placed on children is completely disproportionate to what we expect of ourselves as adults. New York is a national leader when it comes to safe learning environments, and we have a unique opportunity to foster best practices on lockdown drills through Senator Gounardes' and Assemblymember Simon's bill."

"For too long, our leaders have punted the responsibility for the epidemic of gun violence to students and young people—forcing us to live through traumatizing lockdown drills, instead of preventing would-be shooters from accessing guns in the first place," said **Conor Webb, a**

student at Guilderland High School and March For Our Lives Chapter Lead in Albany. “We should be spending more time preventing shootings, rather than only responding to them. It’s time to shift the burden off of already traumatized students. It’s time for leaders to take responsibility and address the root causes fueling this epidemic, rather than leaving the burden of survival on students alone.”

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RELATED LEGISLATION

2023-S6537A

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 - ◦ In Committee Assembly
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- ○ Passed Assembly
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- Delivered to Governor
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-

Relates to the frequency and implementation of lock-down drills in schools

April 26, 2023

In Assembly Committee

Sponsored by **Andrew Gounardes**

Do you support this bill?