



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Chris Jacobs

## Jacobs Votes To Approve Comprehensive School Safety Package

SENATOR JACOBS March 6, 2018

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(Albany, New York) Senator Chris Jacobs announced passage by the State Senate today on a package of critical school safety measures he co-sponsored that will strengthen security and help keep students safe.

The bills increase the ability of schools to hire qualified security personnel; create new state funding mechanisms for infrastructure investments that improve school safety; increase access to school-based mental health services; expand state actions and intelligence coordination to protect schools against attack; and strengthen penalties for crimes on school

grounds.

“We have an obligation to maintain the safety and sanctity of our school buildings so our children can receive their education in a secure environment,” said Jacobs. “The series of bills we approved today will provide the tools and resources to better protect our students and teachers while giving parents the peace of mind they deserve,” he added.

Included in the more than a dozen bills approved were actions that will increase the ability of schools to hire qualified security personnel, improve school safety through infrastructure investments, increase access to school-based mental health services, and strengthen penalties for crimes committed on school grounds.

The series of bills that Jacobs voted in favor of also expanded state actions to protect schools against an attack by upgrading School Safety Improvement Teams, requiring schools to increase active shooter drills, and improving the gathering and sharing of intelligence to prevent attacks.

Today’s actions build on local initiatives sponsored by Senator Jacobs that secured funding for a new School Resource Officer in the Grand Island School District, and a new police care for the Hamburg Police Department that will be used by the Hamburg District’s School Resource Officer. Additional safety measures are also expected to be unveiled next week as part of the conference’s Security Agenda.

“Nothing is more important than keeping our kids safe,” said Jacobs. “These bills passed today will go a long way in giving parents the peace of mind they deserve that their children will be safe, secure and protected while in school,” Jacobs concluded. A list of the various bills passed today and a brief description of each is below.

***Increasing the Ability of Schools to Hire Qualified Security Personnel:***

- **S7811A and S7810A - Create a School Resource Officers Education Aid Program and Grant Availability** - These new bills define the term “school resource officer” (SRO) to include a retired police officer, retired deputy sheriff, or retired state trooper, or an active duty police officer, deputy sheriff, or state trooper. School districts throughout the state would be authorized to receive state funding to hire an SRO, or contract with a municipality for their services. The officers would be charged with providing improved public safety and security on school grounds and be authorized to carry and possess firearms during the course of their duties if licensed to do so.
- **S6798A - Police Officers in New York City Schools** - The bill improves upon the current placement of unarmed resource officers in New York City schools to provide necessary and potentially life-saving security for children, teachers, and administrators. A New York City police officer would be required to be present at public and private schools during instructional hours and for at least one hour before and after school is in session.
- **S1144A - Peace Officer Status for School Resource Officers** - Provides retired police officers with peace officer status when they are employed by a school district as a school resource officer.
- **S7791 - Adjusting the Earning Limitations for School Resource Officers** - Helps promote the availability of qualified security personnel that could be hired in schools by increasing the earnings limitations for retired police officers while employed by the schools from \$30,000 to \$50,000 annually.

**Improving School Safety with Infrastructure Investments:**

- **S7790 - Security Hardware Aid Program** - The bill provides state education aid to school districts for acquiring safety technology and improving security of their facilities.
- **S7846 - Improve the Smart School Bond Act Allocation Process** - Requires the Smart Schools Review Board to meet monthly and approve plans submitted by schools and notify schools within seven days of a plan being rejected, and for the Board to pay for approved projects within 30 days.
- **S7847 - Guardians for Schools License Plate** - A new “Guardians for Schools” license plate will be created. The plate would raise money to help pay for school resource officers, security training, mental health counseling, security cameras and other school building modifications to improve school safety.

**Increasing Access to School-Based Mental Health Services:**

- **S7805 - Create a New Mental Health Services Coordinator Aid Program and Grants** - Establishes a Mental Health Services Program Coordinator Education Aid Program for the state to reimburse school districts outside the city of New York. Schools would be eligible for \$50,000 in state funding for the hiring of a mental health services coordinator.
- **S7838 - Assess and Improve Mental Health Resources in Schools** - Requires the Department of Education to investigate and report on the number of full and part-time school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists in each school, and the ratio of students to the number of each position. Upon completion of the report, the state must propose how to increase the number of each position to meet the nationally accepted ratios.

### Expanding State Action to Protect Schools against Attack:

- **S7813A - Define School Shootings as Terrorism and Improve Intelligence to Prevent Attacks -**  
New bill enables individuals to be charged with committing an act of terrorism if they knowingly and unlawfully discharge a firearm within 1,000 feet of a school, a place of worship, a mass gathering of 25 or more people, or in a business of one or more employees. Protects such sites under counter-terrorism laws. The bill also requires the establishment of a new Buffalo office to the current **fusion centers** in Albany and New York City and increase the information-sharing and analysis capabilities of the state.
- **S7845 - Increase Active Shooter Drills -** Bill helps schools better prepare in the event of a school violence incident by requiring that two of the four annual “lock-down drills” conducted by schools be held as “active shooter drills.” Schools can then request School Safety Improvement Teams to provide recommendations on how to conduct lock-down and active shooter drills.
- **S7832 - Upgrade School Safety Improvement Teams -** Measure expands the membership of existing required school safety improvement teams to include representatives of the state Division of Homeland Security, State Police, Department of Criminal Justice Services, Office of General Services and Education Department. Allows for the provision of state education aid for the performance of school safety upgrades recommended by a team examination.

### Strengthening Penalties for Crimes on School Grounds:

- **S2521 - Protect School Communities from Violent Threats -** Bill expands existing laws in place to prevent school bomb threats so that threats of intentional acts or a continued course of

action of serious physical harm to 10 or more people on school grounds can be prosecuted as well.

- **S2881 - Prevent School Assaults and Abductions** - The bill, “Suzanne’s Law”, increases the penalties for assault or abductions that take place on school grounds, including nursery schools, and college campuses. Bill would create “Assault- and Abduction-Free School Zones” in which sentences for certain crimes committed against a person on school grounds would be one category higher than existing law specifies.