



**Howie Beigelman | Testimony in Support of HB 544  
Education and Career Readiness Committee | Ohio House of Representatives  
Columbus, OH | June 19, 2018**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Committee:

Ohio Jewish Communities is the government advocacy, public affairs, and community relations voice of the eight Jewish federations and their 150 agencies and partners statewide, including dozens of pre-school, elementary, high school, and university campuses and the thousands of students, staff, and visitors on their grounds each day. On their behalf, we submit this testimony in support of HB 544, and urge a favorable report by the committee and passage by the full House.

HB 544 addresses an issue we consider of unique importance, keeping our schools safe by incorporating safety technologies and infrastructure into design standards for new construction.

**Ohio Jewish Communities Supports HB 544 Based on Our Community Experience & Expertise**

Jewish institutions, schools in particular, have long been a target of extremist groups both inside and outside of this country. As far back as 1974, 21 children and adults were massacred by Arab terrorists who took over an Israeli school. In 1999, a white nationalist opened fire on an early childhood program at one of the Jewish Community Centers in Los Angeles, wounding several people, including three children, and later as he fled, killing a US Postal Carrier. In 2012, the same assailant who murdered a French paratrooper and two other French soldiers also murdered four, including three children – two of them siblings, and the children of an adult victim - at a Jewish school in Toulouse. In 2015, Jewish schools in Belgium temporarily closed due to a credible threat. The UK Home Secretary warned in 2017 that Britain was facing a radical terror threat not seen since the height of the IRA bombings in the 1970s, and specifically included Jewish schools and institutions as targets. And just last year there was the spate of bomb threats received by Jewish Community Centers nationwide, including several across Ohio, which all housed early childhood centers.

So it should be no surprise that because of the ongoing threats our community faces, and the frequency and intensity of the threats, that we support this legislation.

**HB 544 Helps the Ongoing Efforts by School Districts, Chartered Nonpublic Schools, and Faith-Based or Community Groups Including Jewish Communities Statewide**

Because of the aforementioned threats to the Jewish community, many of them aimed at schools, Ohio's Jewish schools, and the community at large, have taken a proactive approach, including appointing security directors whose only focus is ensuring the safety of all community members and visitors at Jewish organizations.

The requirements of this legislation are modest, and they will have a clear impact on safety.

Limiting access, increasing two-way real-time communication and audio and visual abilities, lockdown capabilities, and other physical barriers are all tested ways of helping secure a campus and individual buildings.



We applaud both the focus on these opportunities to best help the broadest numbers of people as well as the inclusion of chartered nonpublic schools within the safety provisions here. Every child, and each teacher, no matter what school, deserves to be safe and able to learn and teach without fear.

### **A Chance to Partner & Share Best Practices**

Another potential benefit of this legislation is the chance for school communities across Ohio to share in best practices and learn from each other.

Our community security leaders look forward to the chance to share their expertise, and to learn from others. They were unable to be in Columbus today, but look forward to the chance to offer testimony in the future.

As well, they offer the committee, the bill sponsors, and other interested parties, an invitation to meet with them for a site visit and a more in-depth discussion regarding ways to improve security for all. Unfortunately, our community remains a high value target. However, that means that we have valuable experiences to share with others who are also targets or potential targets.

### **Welcome Changes & Amendments**

Again, this legislation is important, but it is also modest. It includes no funding for recommended safety improvements.

This is despite the fact that the types of improvements and safety equipment suggested here can be among the most cost-effective or efficient in providing the widest shield of potential protection, or, helping in monitoring and responding to threats or active security situations.

We would welcome changes to this legislation that provide equitable funding for schools as they construct – and potentially renovate - buildings to create more secure spaces for learning.

### **Conclusion & Next Steps**

On behalf of our pre-schools, schools, and institutions connected to higher education, we urge the committee to report favorably on this bill. We urge the House to pass it.

And we hope that the committee and other legislative and public safety leaders will visit with our experts to see what they have done, and what work they believe still should be done to keep everyone at school safe and secure.

Thank you, and we would welcome the opportunity to follow-up with the committee on any questions they have.

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