



STATE SENATOR
JOE SCHIAVONI

33RD DISTRICT

**Senate Finance Committee
Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 258
June 5, 2018**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 258 which would help protect children in schools across all of our districts. Some of this may sound familiar because this is the second time I have introduced this legislation and sadly, school violence is still a reality our children face.

The incredible number of violent acts that occur every day in this country is alarming to say the least. This is especially true when it involves children. The heartbreaking events of the last few years have made it clear that we must immediately concentrate on real solutions regarding the safety of our children while they are in school.

In the 130th General Assembly, Attorney General Mike DeWine and I held a school safety roundtable with educators and law enforcement officials from Mahoning and Columbiana counties. Most superintendents, principals and local police officers know what they need to do in order to protect the kids in their individual district, but do not have the resources to execute their plan. The most common feedback we received was that their particular district is strapped for funds and that school safety improvements and funding for additional staff such as security guards, counselors and resource officers are often very difficult to afford. In the current violence prevention and school safety grant program run by the Ohio Department of Education, grant recipients are generally required to provide a local matching contribution at a ratio of one-to-one.

In the 130th General Assembly we passed Senate Bill 42, which allows school districts to levy dollars specifically for school safety purposes. While some local districts may have support for additional local levies, as of late it has proven very difficult to pass levies. In my legislative district, one of the main concerns I have heard from superintendents and school boards is their inability to go back to the ballot for additional dollars in order to make safety improvements. There simply is not support in placing 100% of the cost on the local property owner. Instead, the state should be investing more in the security of our schools, rather than relying on the local taxpayer to cover the costs in keeping kids safe.

SB 258 would provide Ohio school districts with additional funds for increased safety and security for students. The legislation would appropriate an additional \$34 million in both fiscal years 2018 and 2019 to be used for school safety projects. The funding would have to be used to increase safety measures but allows the flexibility for schools to meet individualized needs. The funding distribution would be based on a district's enrollment, with four tiers ranging from \$25,000 for districts with less than 1,000 students, \$50,000 for districts of 1,000 to 2,000 students, \$75,000 for districts of 2,000 to 10,000 students, and \$100,000 for districts with 10,000 or more students. I believe that investing \$68 million over the next two years to protect young people's lives is a meaningful measure that school districts desperately need.

To maintain accountability, school districts would be required to submit an application to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) on how they will use the funds to increase school safety. An ODE approval process will then consider and approve applications that meet predetermined criteria. Applications would be non-competitive, so any approved district safety project would receive funds.

To conclude, I know that SB 258 will not be a cure-all in preventing all future tragedies, it will surely help and is something of real substance that we can build on.

Chairman Oelslager, I thank you for the opportunity to testify and am willing to answer any questions at this time.