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SENATOR
EDDIE LUCIO, JR.

August 2, 2018

The Honorable Larry Taylor
Chairman, Senate Select Committee on Violence in Schools and School Security
PO Box 12068
Austin, TX 78701

Chairman Taylor:

Thank you for your leadership on the Senate Select Committee on Violence in Schools and School Security. As we learned in the hearings, school safety is a multifaceted issue impacting fields as diverse as education, criminal justice, law enforcement, and health, and bringing stakeholders in all those fields together under the common purpose of the safety of our students is a monumental achievement. From your efforts in this committee and your other work for education, I know that all of your constituents - especially those in Santa Fe - can be proud to call you their Senator.

I was particularly interested in testimony concerning the physical layout of schools and the security opportunities that exist in hardening access to school grounds and campuses. Our children are our most precious resource, and they deserve our best efforts to keep them safe while they are in the care of public schools.

As we learned, schools are already required to develop a safety plan and conduct regular audits to continuously improve campus safety. However, there is little guidance in law on best practices in building design and physical security aspects to emergency readiness and response. I am grateful that the report includes recommendations about updating building codes to take these best practices into account; beyond these efforts, though, I believe existing schools can also be more reflective about security measures they can take to keep students safe.

In the upcoming session, I encourage my fellow members to support the appropriation of financial resources for school districts looking to upgrade their security infrastructure. Likewise, I encourage the Legislature to consider improvements to the requirements of district emergency operations plans and audits. Additional statutory guidance can ensure that safety audits are comprehensive, encompassing every aspect of school safety including structural barriers to entry, school security personnel, student and staff lockdown or evacuation procedures, and any other information that will help school officials self-assess their readiness for an emergency situation.



Additionally, I give my strongest support to the committee's recommendations related to the provision of counseling and mental health services. Our school counselors, in particular, are a resource that we have regrettably failed to fully leverage to not only prevent school violence, but also to improve student wellbeing in general.

In my over thirty years as a state legislator, I have relentlessly advocated for policies that aim to increase the quantity and effectiveness of counselors in Texas, including legislation to ensure counselors spend most of their time on counseling – which is their primary responsibility. In discussions on that topic, many small school districts had concerns that such a requirement would erode their flexibility to staff their schools with limited resources. Although these concerns certainly have merit, these positions represent status quo. The solution is simple: be proactive, not reactive. The state must provide the financial support that is necessary to ensure all schools can most effectively leverage the powerful potential for student health that school counselors represent. We must let nothing - not the vast geography of Texas, nor the competing demands in our state budget - stand in the way of ensuring the health and safety of our children.

Again, thank you for facing the challenge of school safety head-on through your leadership on this committee. I look forward to tackling this and other educational issues by your side in the 86th Legislative Session; it is a privilege to serve as your Vice Chair of the Senate Education Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eddie Lucio, Jr." with a small flourish at the end.

Eddie Lucio, Jr.
State Senator

ELJ/cwl

