



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE OF DELEGATES
RICHMOND

**M. KIRKLAND "KIRK" COX
SPEAKER**

SPEAKER'S ROOM - STATE CAPITOL
POST OFFICE BOX 406
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
RULES (CHAIRMAN)

November 8, 2018

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Select Committee on School Safety

FROM: Speaker Kirk Cox, Chair, Select Committee on School Safety

RE: Priority Recommendations for Select Committee Report

When I established the Select Committee on School Safety - the first House Select Committee in 150 years - my hope was to elevate the issue of school and student safety, and work in a bipartisan, inclusive, and collaborative manner to produce legislative and budgetary recommendations for the 2019 General Assembly.

Over the past few months, this Committee worked diligently to create dialogues with key stakeholders, visited countless schools across the Commonwealth, and received nearly 60 draft legislative and budgetary proposals. I know each of you devoted considerable time and effort to this initiative, and I want to express my sincere appreciation for that.

In my opening remarks at our first Committee meeting, I stated that my goal was for this to be a "do-something" Committee and that our final product was going to be comprehensive and consensus-driven. I believe we have accomplished this goal. The draft proposals that our subcommittees received and presented at our last meeting are indicative of the creative and thoughtful process I asked Vice Chair Danny Marshall and our subcommittee chairs to lead. These proposals span topics that range from school counseling and mental health to building codes and security enhancements. Taken together, we have laid out a multi-year blueprint for improving school safety that we can draw from as we move into the deliberative process.

My focus since our last Committee meeting has been to develop a path forward to ensure our most important and effective proposals are positioned to receive support from the majority of both legislative bodies and the governor. To that end, I asked staff to work with key stakeholder groups to consolidate the subcommittee proposals into a list of priorities that our Committee can present to the General Assembly in January. I have enclosed this proposed list for your review.

These priorities include numerous legislative suggestions that were discussed during the subcommittee process. Chief among them, the General Assembly should realign the responsibilities of school counselors so that the majority of their time is spent providing direct student services. This is a more cost-effective way to increase student access to counseling than lowering the counselor-to-student ratio. The proposed list also includes several budgetary recommendations that, based on input the Committee received, would be the most effective use of limited resources. Among these, are increased funding for School Resource Officers, expanded funding capacity for the School Equipment Grant Fund, and new funding for the Center for School and Campus Safety.

Additionally, the proposed list includes the creation of a Commission on Student Mental Health that will be comprised of legislators and subject-matter experts and will be tasked with conducting a more thorough analysis of the various mental health-related proposals our Committee received. The biggest challenge facing our schools is student mental health. I believe there are actions we can take to help address this problem; yet, we should be certain that what we're proposing is supported by evidence and informed by subject-matter expertise. In addition to these priorities, the Division of Legislative Services will include the complete list of proposals received by the Committee in the final report as a reference for anyone interested in submitting legislation that may not be included in our discussion on November 14.

In preparation for our November 14 meeting, I have asked the Division of Legislative Services and Appropriations Committee staff to present each of these proposals, the necessary statutory or budgetary changes, and answer any technical questions the Committee may have. Since these concepts represent what the General Assembly will most likely see in the form of school safety legislation in January, I thought it would be helpful to have staff explain in greater detail how the concepts could be adapted into legislation or budget language. It is then my hope that the Committee will vote to authorize the Division of Legislative Services to prepare the final report of proposals for the 2019 General Assembly.

Once again, I want to thank you for your time and attention to this initiative. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I look forward to seeing each of you on November 14 in Harrisonburg.