



TODD NOVAK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 237-9151
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0051
Rep.Novak@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

DATE: Wednesday, February 6th, 2024
RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 1050
TO: Assembly Committee on Education
FROM: State Representative Todd Novak

Thank you Chairman Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Education for holding this public hearing on Assembly Bill 1050, relating to position authorizations in the Office of School Safety.

I authored this bill with Senator Quinn after working throughout the fall on a short-term solution to continue funding for the Office of School Safety (OSS). OSS is a division of the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) created in 2018 to keep students safe at school. OSS has become a critical resource for students, teachers, school administrators and education communities throughout Wisconsin, with the intent to prevent violence in schools.

While the program has seen significant success in keeping students and teachers safe, the OSS has struggled to maintain adequate funding to support a full-time program.

AB 1050 ensures that OSS may retain the necessary full-time staffing levels and continue to fund the program through the fall of 2025, while providing DOJ the ability to re-allocate existing funding sources from permitting fees the Department collects from issuing Conceal Carry Permits to fund OSS.

We worked closely with DOJ officials, including the office of the Attorney General, to address the current funding shortfall at OSS. We worked to ensure that the funding reallocation would not hamper the resources at DOJ, while ensuring that OSS can continue to operate at its existing capacity while DOJ officials continue to work with the Legislature on long-term solutions for the program.

The Office of School Safety has been proven as an effective tool in preventing violence and other potential threats in our schools. It is important that we continue to provide funding for this important program.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 1050.



RICE LAKE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Steven G. Roux
Chief of Police

Brian F. Larson
Captain of Administration

Matthew T. Bach
Captain of Operations

34 S. Wilson Ave. • Rice Lake, WI 54868

To the Assembly members of Wisconsin

I come to you on behalf of the schools in Barron County:

Our first major interaction with the Office of School Safety came when Jayme Closs was abducted in 2018. Since then, Speak Up Speak Out has been a very beneficial service that several of our students have used over the last couple of years. SUSO has been used to prevent self-harm, bullying, and identify a victim of child abuse and a sexual assault. One tip we received identified a possible school attack that we were able to address. SUSO allows individuals to seek help when they otherwise would not know who to contact. SUSO is a preventive safeguard for our children and communities.

I also come to you on behalf of the schools in the city of Rice Lake:

Last year the RL schools were hit with much tragedy for both staff and students from the traumatic impact of 8 deaths.

In October four deaths hit our small community on the same weekend. There was a vehicle accident, and two girls died. I did the funeral for one of the girls and saw the bewilderment and loss as I cared for her friend group. The same weekend was the death of a former student who was an assistant coach and well-liked by the staff and community. When I did the death notification, I knew there was going to be some deep trauma for our community. Also, that weekend a school staff member lost their spouse in an accident. Mid-November a student died who was in the same friend group of the girls in the car accident. In March the middle school had a "swatting call" falsely claiming there was an active shooter in the middle school. This really shook up some of the teachers as I saw some of them crying. March 30th was the first death by suicide. Many of his friends came to see the counselors, more than they could handle, so the school included other district counselors and myself to help. April 8th was the tragic day we lost two officers as they were killed in the line of duty. This had a great impact on all of our schools. April 20th was another student death by suicide and the school called me for help at the same time I was helping the family.

Our teachers, counselors and students were under trauma fatigue. We needed help. I called the Office of School Safety. Director Trish came and shared with the staff at the HS and MS. This was truly needed and helped the staff greatly and in many ways.

I hope this helps you get a feel for the importance of the continuation of USO and need for this Bill, for this vital program cares for our students and staff here in Wisconsin.

Thanks for your time and support.
Law Enforcement Chaplain Cody Kargus



STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Josh Kaul
Attorney General

Room 114 East, State Capitol
PO Box 7857
Madison WI 53707-7857
(608) 266-1221
TTY 1-800-947-3529

TESTIMONY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Assembly Committee on Education
Wednesday, February 7, 2024, 9:30am CST

Representative Kitchens, Chair, and Representative Dittrich, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Trish Kilpin, and I have been the Director of the Office of School Safety since February of 2022. Thank you very much for holding today's public hearing on 2023 Senate Bill 955/2023 Assembly Bill 1050, relating to position authorizations in the Office of School Safety. I also want to thank Representative Novak and Senator Quinn for their leadership on this important issue – the Department of Justice supports this legislation.

In response to the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, the Wisconsin Office of School Safety (OSS) was created in 2018 with the passage of Act 143. The office was created with one position, that of the director. OSS was originally tasked with disseminating \$100 million dollars in grants to schools, collecting 5 required school safety document submissions from each school, and bringing model school safety practices to Wisconsin.

In addition to successfully distributing \$99.2 million in grants to schools and guiding schools through their required document submissions, OSS has developed nationally respected model programs proven to keep schools safe from violence. OSS provides resources, trainings, guidance, and interventions to prevent violence from occurring, protect our students and staff from violence, reduce the impact of crisis events if they do occur, and promote recovery. OSS serves all private, public and tribal Wisconsin schools at no cost to the school, training all Wisconsin stakeholders in these best practices for local implementation and providing individualized support and consultation.

OSS' Speak Up, Speak Out (SUSO) threat reporting tipline is being successfully utilized in WI schools. OSS staffs SUSO 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with trained analysts who respond to tips in real time. Launched in September 2020, SUSO seen a significant growth in tips. SUSO staff have responded to over 10,000 reported contacts in WI schools, including 196 tips concerning planned school attacks, and 223

for guns/weapons, resulting in opportunities for intervention and preventing school violence. All tips received by SUSO are delivered to the impacted school. In addition, tips are delivered to law enforcement when they pertain to life safety or criminal matters, allowing for local response.

OSS trains teams on **Threat Assessment and Management** principals and application, empowering school and law enforcement teams to determine if a child poses a threat, and how to respond effectively to prevent school violence. OSS has developed the Wisconsin School Threat Assessment Protocol, which is available for use in all schools. Threat Assessment consultations are provided for specific cases.

OSS' **Critical Incident Response** (CIR) project provides accessible model crisis response practice guidance to all Wisconsin schools. OSS has built and trained 12 regional multi-disciplinary Critical Incident Response Teams for local deployment in a crisis event. OSS provides case specific guidance to schools after a crisis event to support effective recovery.

In the aftermath of school shootings, we ask "What could have been done to prevent this tragedy?" We know what works to prevent these acts. The answers are rooted in prevention programs like SUSO and intervention programs Threat Assessment. OSS leads this work in Wisconsin, and our efforts are working in our schools.

Current federal funding for OSS will end in December 2024. The passage of this bill will allow OSS to continue their current operations, providing critical services to prevent violence and keep Wisconsin schools safe, and we would appreciate your support.

Third party validators: Office of School Safety

The OSS has received feedback from stakeholders throughout Wisconsin who serve a diverse group of school staff and students in urban, suburban, and rural areas, from public and private school leadership, pupil services, and law enforcement. Here are excerpts of letters we have received providing feedback about Office of School Safety staff, training events, model practices, and resources provided to all Wisconsin schools.

From Scott Johnson, Buildings and Grounds Manager/ Safety Coordinator, La Crosse School District, and Vice President of WSSCA Board of Directors:

We have made great progress with the addition of the Department of Justice Office of School Safety leading the way. Our organization, WSSCA has become a wonderful partner and believe our work together will keep Wisconsin Schools safer.

Last week, I attended a Critical Incident Response Team training through the DOJ Office of School Safety to become a responder for CESA 4. This training along with numerous other trainings offered by the DOJ Office of School Safety has been extremely beneficial for those in my profession. The Office of School Safety staff has done great work for our schools with a limited staff since its creation 4 years ago.

They have rolled out programs such as Speak Up Speak Out anonymous reporting, the Standard Response Protocol for incidents and Threat Assessment training for school staff, and the Critical Incident Response Team to name a few. The funding for some of these very important programs will be running out in a year due to grants. If we want to continue to keep our schools safe, we desperately need these programs. Over my time in the education field, I have seen a great deal of turnover due to retirement and those seeking other careers. There has been a strain on schools in recent years, but we cannot let this great resource go away.

From Chief Ryan Vossekuil, Jackson Police Department and OSS Advisory Board Member:

I've been an advisory board member of the Office of School Safety since it's inception in 2018. I've seen firsthand the vital work that has been done over the past five years. Director Kilpin and her staff have done an incredible job not just advocating for school safety but working with all stakeholders to implement a statewide 24/7 tip-line, standardizing response protocols, and threat assessment training across the state of Wisconsin. Two weeks ago, we hosted OSS staff in Jackson as they trained a classroom full of educators and law enforcement officers for a coordinated response to critical incidents.

From Lt. Nathan Cihlar, Detective Bureau, Wausau Police Department:

Our reactive responses and proactive efforts in crisis intervention, threat assessment, and threat response are much more efficient, timely, and effective because the office has brought about regular training statewide that brings school staff and law enforcement together to learn and train together. Due to OSS efforts, local law enforcement, parents, staff and students have a renewed and unified confidence within our school communities that all of us all are capable and prepared to proactively address threats and take appropriate action in emergency situations.

Furthermore, for similar reasons Police Officers and their agencies must be held accountable to annual training requirements and updates by the LESB, families in Wisconsin deserve assurance their local schools are held to a high and consistent standard in school safety best practices and training on a continuous basis.

From Mike Altekruise, Ph.D., Mental Health Coordinator, Neenah Joint School District:

I am the Mental Health Coordinator at Neenah Joint School District (NJSD). You may have heard about our student who killed his grandparents at their home in Grand Chute in April of 2019. He also had set out an elaborate plan to shoot students at Neenah High School, but changed his mind and called the police on himself instead.

I have three kids in our district and my wife is a school counselor at Neenah High School (NHS) and as a psychologist, I know what people who are in crisis are capable of. Each year since I started at NJSD in 2015, I have researched all I could learn about how to address the issues that lead students to take drastic actions when they are in crisis due to their environment and/or due to their mental health issues. My goal is to reduce the likelihood of something happening like what almost occurred in April of 2019 that could have taken the life of my wife, my child, and all the children and staff who were at NHS that day.

Even before this incident I had taken the idea of threats seriously and I had already received training in 2018 through the DOJ in threat assessments. I doubled my efforts after April 2019 and decided to rewrite our NJSD Threat Assessment Policies. You will find on that link a 27-page document that includes the research on how to prevent mass shootings from The Violence Project), the U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Dept of Homeland Security, and National Threat Assessment Center. I also attended a weeklong training on Critical Incident Response Training last summer put on by the Office for School Safety (OSS) and I went to a threat assessment training with Student Resource Officers in Pewaukee in early May of this year.

Through all this training, I have been supported by the Office for School Safety (OSS). Trish Kilpin, Kelly DeJonge, and Sue Williams have made themselves available to me to support our efforts to bring the Speak Up Speak Out (SUSO) tipline to our students. Through this tipline we have learned of students who have brought weapons to school, have made suicidal gestures, were being abused by parents, sold drugs in school, and numerous other incidents our staff

would not have been aware of had it not be for SUSO. OSS staff have revised the original materials on threat assessments to better fit school districts. I am part of a pilot program on how to triage threat assessments with the OSS as well. And I consulted them when our newspaper was printing a story online that discussed the graphic details of the student's plan to do a mass shooting at our school that I mentioned earlier.

Through their efforts, we were able to get the newspaper to rewrite the article before it went to print. Our students, for the most part, are doing okay. We have seen surprising resilience with many of our students who have gone through some tumultuous times over the past three years. I teach our high school students about their sources of strength and how to reach out to trusted adults when they or their friends are in need of support.

When it comes to school shooters, however, there is no room for complacency. We are not experts on violent behaviors at schools. The staff at the OSS are experts. And we need their support whether it is for prevention or response to crises. The OSS is requesting 14.2 positions and 2.2 million dollars of funding over the next biennium to continue current operations, including the following important services: Speak Up Speak Out tipline, Critical Incident Response training, consultation, and support, Threat Assessment training and consultation, General School Safety guidance support, technical assistance, and training.

Their initiatives are making a difference. We are reducing our suspensions/expulsions at NJSD, while increasing the care and support for our students in crisis. We have used what we have learned for the OSS to help students who are in crisis connect to their parents, who are often unaware of the seriousness of their student's state of crisis. And we have been able to connect these students to in school supports and mental health resources in the community. That is the ultimate goal of threat assessments--to keep kids in school, give them support, repair damaged relationships, educate them about social media and hate speech, and to connect them to trusted adults in and out of school. Too often, we drop effective programs to save money and we end up with the consequences of those actions. We saw this with the closing down of several mental health agencies in the 1980s that instantly increased our homeless population and filled our jails with mentally ill people. For us to make a dent in mass shootings, particularly at the schools, we need experts whose job is to give us the most up-to-date best practices and provides us with trainings and the opportunity to consult.

From Dr. Jeff Weiss, Superintendent, and William Haithcock, Chief of School Leadership, Kenosha Unified School District:

To start with, I would like to share that I find the SUSO program to be a HUGE asset to our district. Before the DOJ put out this program, we were paying in excess of \$16,000 a year to purchase a program that I now consider to be less effective than the program WI DOJ offers. Kids, families, community members can now submit claims to SUSO expressing concern over bullying, threats, physical aggression and more. Our last provider did not actively monitor the system, so reports that came in overnight were typically identified by school staff later that morning. Now, when someone reports a serious threat, SUSO is there to monitor it 24 hours a day. They do a great job communicating with local law enforcement agencies, who know how to contact school administration, so that we can investigate these threats before our students even get up for school the next morning, in all sincerity, I am not sure what we would do if we did not have this process in place. It has helped to put a stop to several significant problems this year, just in Kenosha.

I also would like to commend the work that the WI DOJ is leading in terms of threat assessment. Five years ago, Kenosha Unified was one of just a few school systems that were able to participate in training that was offered by a national group called, The Sandy Hook Promise. That work, here in Wisconsin, is now being spearheaded by the WI DOJ, Unfortunately, kids make threatening statements when they get upset. Sometimes they write a threat on the wall of a bathroom stall, sometimes they call in a threat, or post it on social media. Therefore, schools need a number of trained professionals to implement a researched based practice to investigate the seriousness of the threat. WI DOJ is providing school districts with the necessary resources and training that the schools (public and private) need to handle these challenging situations. -The DOJ model also offers an excellent template to help schools develop a "safety plan" when it becomes time to re-integrate a student who has made a threat back into the school system.

Prior to all this, schools were left on their own to make these determinations. Well intended people were saying things like, "Well I don't think the student was being serious." and then admitting them back into school. (They had no choice, because there was no real training.) Today, it is not a perfect system, but the WI DOJ now provides us with a model that would be considered best practice. Without that support, we will be back to the days when we were just making the best decisions that we could.

From John Stangler, School Safety Coordinator, Pewaukee School District:

The services offered by this office, including the Speak Up, Speak Out tipline, Critical Incident Response training, consultation and support, Threat Assessment training and consultation, as well as General School Safety guidance support, technical assistance, and training, are essential components in creating safe learning environments for our students.

The Speak Up, Speak Out tipline provides a vital avenue for students, staff, and community members to report concerns about potential threats or safety issues. This valuable resource encourages individuals to come forward and confidentially share important information, ensuring that schools can proactively address potential risks and maintain a safe environment for everyone.

Critical Incident Response training, consultation, and support offered by the Office of School Safety equip educational institutions with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively respond to emergencies or critical incidents. These services contribute to the overall preparedness of schools and enable them to mitigate risks and safeguard the lives of students and staff.

Threat Assessment training and consultation play a pivotal role in identifying and managing potential threats within school settings. By providing schools with the necessary tools and guidance, the Office of School Safety helps prevent incidents and supports early intervention strategies that promote a culture of safety and well-being.

Moreover, the General School Safety guidance support, technical assistance, and training offered by the Office of School Safety provide invaluable resources to schools, enabling them to develop comprehensive safety plans, implement evidence-based practices, and continually improve their safety protocols. These services foster a proactive approach to school safety and empower educational institutions to create secure learning environments.

From Glenn Rehberg, Chief of Police, Cornell Police Department:

School shootings continue to occur around the country. As police chief I have requested the assistance of Speak Up, Speak Out three times (!) in my own small community to search for digital footprints left by students who have made threats—and Speak Up Speak Out is available 24/7, when I needed them. Small police departments have nowhere else to turn for such specialized and timely assistance.

Another example of small-town impact is shown by my school administration's attendance at OSS's Threat Assessment training, which lets us cooperatively partner to protect students by not overresponding, or under-responding, to concerning behaviors and threats.

From Donna Bembenek, President, Catholic Memorial High School:

Catholic Memorial High School (CMH) was dramatically impacted by the events of the Waukesha Christmas parade in December 2021. Without the OSS, our students would have been at a great disadvantage. The effects of that experience continue to this day.

Did you know that Catholic Memorial High School draw students from over forty different cities/villages and six different counties? Students from many districts are benefiting from the services provided by OSS as a result of a grant CMH received following the parade. The support provided immediately after the parade and the mental health services provided in the months and years following the parade have proven critically important.

At first, one might think of the critical incident as episodic, but it is actually longitudinal in nature. Support service available from OSS have enabled us to help not only our current students who were in the parade, at the parade or had family members hurt during the parade – but the elementary school students now entering high school who were also present on that awful day.

The OSS provides a variety of important services such as the Speak Out and Speak Up Hotline, critical incident response training, consultation and support, threat assessment and general school safety guidance and support. It is difficult for us all to realize school violence is too common an occurrence. Anything we can do to prevent tragedies from happening and support them when they do is an important investment, we must all make.

From S/Sgt Dane Coonen, Threat Assessment Officer, Appleton Police Department:

The Office of School Safety offers many resources that very few organizations provide. OSS offers a service that has been determined as one of the most significant preventative measures to school violence, Speak Up Speak Out. This reporting system is a way for staff and students to report not just threats of violence towards students or schools but as been a voice for those that otherwise not had the courage to speak up regarding an issue. We, Appleton Police, don't just receive notifications regarding violence but get reports

involving fights, sexual assaults, acts of bullying and many other situations. What Office of School Safety has created with Speak Up Speak Up possibly may have been the reporting measure that prevented an attack in a school in Wisconsin. I can speak to that, as I have investigated the reports and made arrests because of the information that was provided within these reports. FBI data indicates that in 80% of cases of school shootings, at least one person knew of the attack prior to the attack occurring. The act of telling someone of their attack is called leakage. Leakage is one of the most important warning signs to be aware of because it provides the ability for intervention. We need a successful reporting system that everyone in the state has access to and that system is Speak Up Speak Out. Office of School Safety created that. This system is monitored 24/7, which is mandatory to make sure the information and interventions are done immediately.

Several years ago, I was first introduced to the Wisconsin Threat Assessment Model. This assessment has been used in the Appleton Area School District many times. In fact, I have this model memorized. Most communities do not have an officer with the experience such as I to be able to handle these situations. Office of School Safety created a working document that supports the best practices for the ability to handle a threat towards the school community. Law Enforcement is not taught this in any fashion of their training, yet, Office of School Safety has made it their mission to educate all. That type of training is priceless. As a father of 3 children, I hope and pray that my children are never involved in violence. By having our teachers, school staff, and School Resource Officers trained in identifying the warning signs and being able to convene a team and use the assessment that OSS created will save lives, I promise you that. This is not a one and done. This process, as I have come to find out, is a continuing education.

Office of School Safety is again trying to improve the safety of all by creating a triage for the Wisconsin Threat Assessment Model. This model is 32 pages long. Not every teacher nor principal has the time to complete this. I am also working with OSS on creating the triage process. What they have currently have in place works. I have been using this model for several years, but again, not every departing or school district can utilize a position such as mine.

Last summer, I attended a training course through Office of School Safety to become a member of the Critical Incident Response Team. Imagine a significant event that occurs at a school and not having the resources nor staff to assist in getting that school community back to normal, will be devastating. That is what this team is designed to do. Being a part of this team and having the availability of this team is invaluable to ever school, no matter the size or location.

From Sheriff Scott Haines, Clark County:

The Clark County Sheriff's Office Command Staff and Clark County Chiefs of Police attended a school safety presentation. The presenter, Trish Kilpin, State of Wisconsin, Department of Justice, covered essential points, including changes in school/home climate, school safety, mental health, and the need to work together as a county.

After the Law Enforcement meeting, we decided to take this training to the next level by setting up a date for Trish's presentation in front of school principals, school counselors, school psychologists, and particular education case managers/supervisors. By bringing all the players to the table, we can ensure we comply with training, standards, and requirements.

Practical threat assessment training provides valuable information about a student's risks and personal resources. Risks such as suicide, alcohol and drug use, physical abuse, dropping out, and criminal activity can and may be identified and prevented.

In Clark County, the training changed how Law Enforcement approached school-related incidents. We now work together with school officials as a threat assessment team. As a team, we determine the severity of the threat and how to choose the appropriate response to the student's behavior.

The OSS also collaborated with, and received recognition and support from Michele Gay, Co-founder and Executive Director for Safe and Sound Schools. An excerpt of her letter in support of OSS stable funding follows:

I am writing to you to request that the State of Wisconsin continue to strive to make schools safe for your students, staff, and community. Great progress has been made with the addition of the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Office of School Safety (OSS) leading the way.

The OSS staff has done great work for Wisconsin schools with a limited staff since its creation in 2018. The OSS rolled out a 24/7/365 resource center which includes a 4-pronged approach to school safety through threat reporting, threat assessment, critical response and best practices through technical assistance and grants.

- Speak Up Speak Out Wisconsin is a confidential statewide threat reporting tool for school communities to report concerning behavior, free from retaliation.

- The OSS has trained thousands of school and law enforcement staff in threat assessment and provide consultation on complex threat management.
- The OSS also provides training in The Standard Response Protocol and Standard Reunification Method to strengthen school safety plans.
- The OSS teaches PREPaRE 2 curriculum of evidence-based practices to reaffirm safety, promote recovery, and reduce post traumatic trauma symptoms experienced by youth and school staff. This training has led to the development of 12 regionally based critical response teams to assist with critical incidents in WI schools.
- The OSS is also legislatively required to provide best practice training, technical assistance and grants for schools for safety plans, violence drills and digital mapping.

The funding for these very important programs will be running out in December 2023 due to federal grant deadlines. If we want to continue to keep Wisconsin schools safe, we desperately need to sustain these programs.

If you have any questions or would like any additional information, please contact me at (608) 347-1314 or Trish.Kilpin@wisdoj.gov .

Thank you for consideration of this testimony.