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SCHOOL SECURITY TASK FORCE

House Bill 4675 as amended 6-23-93 and
with Appropriations Committee
amendments
Second Analysis (4-28-94)

Sponsor: Rep. Kirk A. Profit
First Committee: Education
Second Committee: Appropriations

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The 1990 Youth Risk Behavior Survey asked a representative sample of students in grades 9 through 12: "During the past 30 days, how many times have you carried a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, for self-protection or because you thought you might need it in a fight?" The responses indicated that 19.6 percent of the students (and 31.5 percent of the males) had carried a weapon at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey.

Of the high school seniors in the Class of 1991 responding to a University of Michigan survey, 6.5 percent said someone had injured them with a weapon (such as a gun, knife, or club) at school during the past 12 months one or more times and over 16 percent said someone had threatened them with a weapon (but not injured them). (Source for the above: Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1991, issued by the U.S. Department of Justice.)

A deputy superintendent from the Lansing School District told the House Education Committee that there were 101 "incidents involving weapons on school property" in the 1991-92 school year, and said that "an increasing number of the firearms confiscated from students are the property of the student's parents who failed to secure the firearm from access by their child."

Whatever the other disagreements are over how children should be educated, it is generally accepted that the school environment ought to be safe. Students should not be fearful because of the presence of weapons in and around their schools. Yet apparently this is all too often the case. Some people believe that new efforts need to be made to investigate this problem and attack it on several fronts at once.

To this end, legislation has been developed that would require the state police to establish and maintain a firearms safety program that would educate children about the dangerous nature and safe handling of firearms (enrolled House Bill 4674; Public Act 321 of 1993); establish "weapon-free school zones" (House Bill 4673, currently in the Senate Committee on Family Law, Mental Health, and Corrections); provide for the establishment of local school security task forces to investigate and make recommendations regarding the problem of weapons in schools (enrolled House Bill 4672; Public Act 320 of 1993); and establish a state school security task force within the Department of Education to review and make recommendations regarding problems with weapons with schools. The state task force is proposed by House Bill 4675.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would create the School Security Task Force Act, under which there would be established an 18-member school security task force within the Department of Education to investigate the problem of weapons in schools and other factors that threaten school security and to recommend administrative and legislative responses to provide students with a safe environment. The act would be repealed effective December 31, 1996.

The state school security task force would be required to:

-- Research and evaluate the problem of weapons in schools and other factors having a negative impact on school security in the state, responses to the problem by school districts and other communities, and responses to the problem in other states.

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-- Evaluate and make recommendations on the feasibility of incorporating the following into a weapons-free school program: developing a statewide reporting system requiring full reporting by schools and school districts of incidents involving weapons in schools to a centralized data repository; providing a uniform set of definitions for identifying and categorizing incidents involving weapons in schools; encouraging active review by government and the public of local school district policies for responding to violence, crime, and discipline problems; expanding the accountability of parents and students so that they would have a more active role and greater responsibility for maintaining safety in the schools; participation by schools and school districts in the Youth Crime Watch of America program; developing and funding academic-based alternative education programs at sites separate from regular school buildings for serious and chronic-repeat offenders and imposing community service requirements for repeat offenders; training for public school employees about laws, rules, and rights relating to violence, crime, and student behavior problems; implementing and enforcing a ban on student use and possession of pagers, cellular telephones, and similar devices at school and school-related events, except as approved for medical or other emergencies; training teachers and other school personnel in conflict resolution; and funding enhanced safety and security features in new school building construction and in renovations to existing school buildings.

-- Submit a report six months after its first meeting, and at least twice annually thereafter, on its activities, findings, and legislative recommendations to the governor, appropriate standing committees of the legislature, and the state board of education. The report would have to contain at least the task force's findings on the extent of the weapons problem in schools and other security-threatening factors; a review of local efforts; an evaluation of existing school district and community programs; and any legislative or administrative recommendations. The task force would also have to issue an annual report to school districts on effective local school security programs.

-- By January 31, 1995, issue a program funding report that would be submitted to the House and Senate Appropriations education subcommittees, among others. The funding report would have to contain an evaluation of local efforts to improve school security; a review of funding currently

available to support those efforts; a proposal for the use of state funds to provide grants to school districts in order to implement school security programs throughout the state; and a projection of the amount of state funding that would be necessary to provide grants to school districts for school security programs.

Task force members would be appointed by the governor. One would be chosen directly by the governor and 17 would be appointed from among 2 nominees submitted by each of the following: the Speaker of the House of Representatives; the Senate Majority Leader; the Department of State Police; the Department of Education; the Michigan Education Association; the Michigan Federation of Teachers; the Michigan Association of School Boards; the Michigan Association of School Administrators; the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals; the Detroit Public Schools; the Michigan Association of Counties; the Michigan Municipal League; the City of Detroit; the Wayne County Prosecutor; the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan; the National Rifle Association; and a juvenile justice association designated by the Department of State Police. The task force would be subject to the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act. The Department of Education would provide technical assistance.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Department of Education has estimated that the task force would cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per year. (5-25-93 and 3-21-94)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill is part of a package aimed at addressing the problem of weapons in and around schools. Proponents say the bills are a first step, but an important one. The task force bills will help community leaders better understand the nature and sources of the problem, as well as evaluate possible solutions. The effort will involve representatives from education, law enforcement, state and local government, the gun-owning community, and others. This is a community-wide problem and it needs the involvement of many sectors of the community. The establishment of local school safety task forces, to find and develop effective local solutions, would be encouraged, while a state task force would be

well-positioned to develop a comprehensive assessment. There would also be an emphasis on firearms education and on reducing the access to firearms and other weapons by minors.

Response:

Is a new task force required? Couldn't the Department of Education undertake these activities alone, consulting with interested parties? Information from the Department of Education suggests a school safety grant program existed from 1985-1990 to fund model approaches to school safety programs. Perhaps those efforts should be evaluated as part of this new program. Moreover, some question whether a state task force would be necessary or appropriate; problems of violence in the schools may best be left to local evaluations and solutions.

Against:

There has been some criticism of the makeup of the state task force being created. While school officials, teachers, and law enforcement are amply represented, it does not contain a student member nor a person specifically representing parent interests (or the interests of "the family." Also, some people have recommended, since "weapons in schools" is so often characterized as a problem that particularly affects central cities and minority youth, that representatives of organizations such as the Urban League or NAACP be on the task force.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Education supports the bill. (4-27-94)

The Michigan Association of School Boards supports the concept of the bill. (4-27-94)