

SCHOOL BOMB THREATS

House Bill 5280 (Substitute H-1) First Analysis (12-10-03)

Sponsor: Rep. Chris Ward
Committee: Veterans Affairs and
Homeland Security

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Unfortunately, bomb threats are an all-too-common occurrence in schools throughout the state. Whether the threats are real or simply a hoax, they nonetheless require a concerted effort on the part of the school district and local law enforcement and emergency response agencies to ensure that the threat, however implausible, is eliminated. In response to a recent bomb threat at a school in the Hartland School District, custodians, at the order of school officials, went through the school unlocking doors to enable emergency responders to search classrooms and other areas. The problem, however, is that a bomb could very easily have been set to detonate once a classroom door opened. The custodians unwittingly placed themselves in a potentially dangerous (and deadly) situation. To avert such a situation from occurring, legislation has been introduced that would prohibit school personnel from being required to enter a school after a bomb threat unless they have received proper training.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to specify that should a public or nonpublic school close or be vacated because of a bomb threat, school officials would be prohibited from requiring school employees to remain in that school or search the school, unless employees have been trained in how to handle bomb threats.

MCL 380.1305

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

According to the *School Safety Practices Report* for the 2001-2002 school year by the Center for Educational Performance and Information within the state Department of Education, approximately 82 percent of schools responding to a survey have a written response plan for bomb threats. The report further notes that during the 2001-2002 school year,

there were 1,588 expulsions, of which 40 were as a result of a bomb threat.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would have no fiscal impact on the state or local units of government. (12-9-03)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill is necessary to ensure that school personnel do not place themselves and children in harm's way when during a bomb threat. If a staff member walks through the school to check for students who haven't evacuated the building or to check for the bomb itself, he or she can unwittingly detonate the bomb simply by opening a door or turning on a light switch, because of a lack of awareness of particular warning signs and traps that indicate danger is imminent. Responses to a bomb threat at school should be left the people are properly trained to handle such instances; not untrained school personnel.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Department of Education indicated that it supports the bill. (12-9-03)

The Michigan Education Association testified in support of the bill. (12-9-03)

A representative from the Hartland Schools Custodial-Maintenance Association testified in support of the bill. (12-9-03)

Analyst: M. Wolf

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

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