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Subject: FW: Opinion Submission

Please see below an opinion submission from Lt. Governor Bryant

Local Schools Deserve More Options to Protect our Kids

The one thing in common among the school shootings that have horrified America and stolen so many precious lives was not the type of weapon, or the type of school or even the type of community. The one thing in common is that no one in the school was shooting back.

The fact is that school shooters prey on gun free zones where they know that they will be unchallenged. Notice that mass shootings do not occur at gun ranges or hunt clubs or any of the 172 Texas school districts that arm certain personnel.

Shooters, regardless of their mental state, obviously seek out those places they know operate without adequate protection or resistance. Or, as President Trump put it, "A 'gun free' school is a magnet for bad people." This simply is common sense, and the response should be equally sensible.

I filed two bills last year, before leaving the Senate, to address school safety in a straightforward and common sense manner. One bill codifies flexibility for already existing state school funds in order to allow schools to use those funds for school safety, including armed resource officers. The bill also specifies that "school safety" includes law enforcement officers. Lottery money, Education Improvement Act and other state general funds already flowing to our schools currently can be used for school safety only by temporary proviso, and that makes year to year planning difficult if not impossible. My bill would make the common sense permanent change to those funding formulas in order to provide maximum flexibility and local control.

My other bill removes the current mandate upon local schools that allows only active law enforcement to enter a school with a weapon. It places with the local districts the authority to determine who might carry a weapon in a school. There is no requirement and not even a suggestion of who might carry a weapon, but I have some ideas.

I know a combat veteran currently teaching at a school in my hometown. That person clearly has the training and experience to wield a weapon in defense of others. I would feel better as a colleague or parent of a child in his school, if I knew he was equipped to fight back during an attack on the school.

Our communities also are filled with retired law enforcement personnel whom schools might employ (although many might volunteer) to help protect and defend the faculty, staff and students. These are just two examples, but the point is that local schools need the flexibility to find solutions among those in their community who care about their schools. My bill provides that flexibility.

President Trump recently endorsed my approach when he said that schools should consider allowing "concealed guns (for) gun adept teachers with military or special training experience". He added that armed staff, "would now be able to immediately fire back if a savage sicko came to a school with bad intentions. Highly trained teachers would also serve as a deterrent to the cowards that do this."

We have debated for years the proper measures to keep schools safe. We do need to increase funding for and attention to mental health, for all ages. We do need to learn from each incident and ensure that our schools and local law enforcement maintain close relationships. We absolutely need to encourage students and parents to turn away from the reinforcements of violence and hate that continually grow in popular culture. All of those things are important.

But, what's most important when someone enters a school and starts firing a gun is that someone is firing back. The longer we wait to ensure that, the longer we will mourn for innocent victims.

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