

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AG Balderas Proposes Statewide School Safety Plan to Protect New Mexico Children

Albuquerque, NM - Attorney General Hector Balderas announced a proposal for immediate action on school safety planning for schools across New Mexico. In a letter sent to New Mexico Public Education Department Secretary Christopher Ruskowski, Attorney General Balderas details the first tier of a multi-tiered plan to bring every school in the state up to a minimum threshold of security within the next school year. The letter also highlights necessary regulatory changes that will mandate safety planning and security measures that are currently not in law and which the Office of the Attorney General's research found what the Attorney General described as a "patchwork system" of safety initiatives that "is inherently filled with dangerous gaps." The letter also calls for pursuing federal funding to ensure that state funds are leveraged and that the measures can be implemented quickly.

"There is no greater duty for every public official in the State of New Mexico than keeping our children safe in school," said Attorney General Balderas. "We can no longer put the burden solely on our teachers and school administrators; it is time for all hands on deck to ensure that our laws and our funding priorities meet the safety needs of our students."

In the wake of tragic and deadly school shootings both locally and nationally, Attorney General Balderas is recommending a comprehensive safety plan to be phased into all 89 New Mexico school districts over the next three years. This plan will ensure that all districts will have equal and adequate safety planning, as well as equal access to funding and resources to protect New Mexico children.

Providing a comprehensive safety plan will allow law enforcement from across New Mexico to accurately identify and capture potential security issues facing New Mexico schools and students.

Some of the recommendations from Attorney General Balderas include:

- Inventorying every school's policies and procedures;
- School mapping (as discussed above);
- Push button locks in all classrooms;
- Adequate public address systems and phone systems with enhanced 911 features and staff trained to used them.

Attorney General Balderas has invited Secretary Ruskowski to co-host a forum, intended to bring together relevant stakeholders to provide insight into these recommendations, how we can expedite implementation and more, and further discuss issues relating to school safety.

Please see attached for a copy of the letter that was sent last week.

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL



HECTOR H. BALDERAS
ATTORNEY GENERAL

June 1, 2018

Secretary Christopher Ruskowski
New Mexico Public Education Department
300 Don Gaspar Avenue
Santa Fe, NM 87501

VIA EMAIL: c.ruskowski@state.nm.us, debbiem.rael@state.nm.us

RE: School Safety Initiatives and Risk Assessment

Dear Secretary Ruskowski,

As New Mexico's chief law enforcement officer, I am writing with urgency and grave concern for the safety of New Mexican school children in both rural and urban communities. In an era of increased risks to our schools from both internal and external threats, it is more critical now than ever that we strengthen the security of our schools. To further that work, and in carrying out my statutory duty to represent the interests of all New Mexicans, my office has undertaken a review of the relevant regulatory frameworks, existing funding, and the work being done to ensure that our schools have the resources needed to ensure physical security and effective threat assessment.

Our research has revealed a patchwork of safety initiatives that do not meet the modern safety needs of our schools. A patchwork system is inherently filled with dangerous gaps, and it is no longer acceptable to leave our schools without a comprehensive safety plan, so I am writing to propose a plan that can be phased in over the next three years. This will ensure that all 89 school districts in the State of New Mexico will have equal and adequate safety planning, as well as equal access to funding and resources to protect our students. Working in concert, the Public Education Department, in partnership with law enforcement, the Public School Facilities Authority, and legislative leaders should implement this plan to increase school safety. These recommendations include enhancing and increasing regulations that mandate comprehensive school safety planning, initial first tier measures we must take immediately, as well as seeking state and federal funding to implement these plans. The ultimate advantage of creating a comprehensive statewide system is that it will give better information to law enforcement partners, who can use that information to

more accurately and effectively capture and better prepare for security issues facing our school kids.

As you are aware, current Public Education Department regulations dictate that schools must create security plans, including emergency operating procedures, which you approve. These rules must increase the detail and robustness of these mandates, as well as create measures such as mandating that school construction be optimized for security and that each school makes school mapping data available to first responders and law enforcement officials. These are just some examples of the necessary steps that must be taken to increase physical security and cooperation among all the necessary stakeholders to increase safety. My office is pleased to share specific insights and lend our resources to drafting these regulations.

Next, we must immediately ensure the physical security of our schools by taking a tiered approach to safety, the first tier of which includes some basic, yet powerful steps to increase safety. The Public School Facilities Authority recently released a report which highlights many of these same first tier recommendations. Notably, the report also suggests that while they are implemented in some school districts, they are either incomplete, out of date, or non-existent in most districts. The Authority also noted that of the top eight identified barriers to increased school security, at least four would be addressed by implementing these recommendations. This tier can and should be implemented within the next school year and includes the following measures:

- Inventorying every schools policies and procedures;
- School mapping (as discussed above);
- Appropriate signage on buildings, school perimeters and parking lots;
- Appropriate LED lighting on school perimeters and parking lots;
- Ensuring each school's perimeter landscaping allows for visibility from within the school;
- Patented key systems, visual monitoring, and cylinder dogging with indicators for all school perimeters;
- Video surveillance of all main entrances, at a minimum, with at least 14 day storage capacity for video systems;
- Visitor badging systems and protocols;
- Push button locks in all classrooms;
- Adequate public address systems and phone systems with enhanced 911 features and staff trained to used them;

These first tier security measures must be taken now to begin securing our schools. These standards are recognized by national school safety experts, and the costs of even these beginning steps are minimal. Once we institute threshold testing and auditing of these first tier measures, and we are

assured that each school meets these security thresholds, we must then work to increase security even more. Again, my office is available to discuss this tiered approach in greater detail.

The final issue I want to make our resources available to you is in securing federal grant funding for increasing school safety. You are likely aware that in the recent omnibus budget bill, Congress made federal appropriations for grant funding for school safety initiatives. While the New Mexico Legislature has appropriated critical capital outlay funds for our schools, we know that resources will continue to be a challenge for New Mexican schools. The number one barrier to increased school security, identified in the Authority's report mentioned above, is funding. Because of these challenges, the State should seek grant funding to increase school security. Again, my office stands ready to assist in any way we can to secure these critical funds.

Based on these recommendations, my office has been in contact with Debbie Rael, your Deputy Secretary of School Transformation, and I am inviting you to co-host a forum with me, where we will gather all of the relevant stakeholders to address these recommendations and other issues surrounding school safety. To further discuss this forum, please contact my Executive Assistant, Victoria Bransford at vbransford@nmag.gov or (505) 490-4060 to set up a time to meet with me and my staff. Thank you for the work that you do to for New Mexican school children, and I look forward to working with you to make them safe.

Respectfully,



Hector Balderas
Attorney General