



Pennsylvania Department of the

# AUDITOR GENERAL

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## News for Immediate Release

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### Auditor General DePasquale to Enhance School Safety Reviews

**HARRISBURG** – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today said he will make significant changes to how his department reviews safety at Pennsylvania’s schools.

“Given that my team has been reviewing school safety issues for more than a decade, now is an appropriate time to assess how we evaluate school safety and make changes where appropriate so that students can feel safe while they learn,” DePasquale said. “When it comes to the safety of students, teachers and staff, I am – and will always be – proactive.”

Following the Nickel Mines Amish School shooting in 2006, the Department of the Auditor General added a school safety component to its school audit objectives.

“In the years since we began to look at school safety as part of our full school audits, we have found that schools are very receptive to our recommendations,” he said. “In particular, most schools have emergency preparedness plans in place that are constantly being reviewed and shared with first responders. However, we still see areas where improvements are needed in school safety.”

The most common audit safety recommendations involve issues with visitor procedures, staff training, practice drills, building entrances and exits, communication and alarm systems, buses and parking, and general building and grounds security.

In particular, auditors have found:

- Lack of single point of entry and exit.
- Unlocked and unoccupied classrooms, gyms and auditoriums.
- Lack of annual practice drills involving first responders.
- School grounds not patrolled by a school resource/security officer.
- Failure to provide annual training on the emergency plan procedures with all staff.
- Exterior doors not numbered or otherwise labeled on the outside to assist emergency responders.
- No alarm systems on exterior doors.
- No assigned or designated staff, student and visitor parking.
- No signs directing visitors to the main office.
- Delivery logs not maintained.
- Central security alarm not active during school hours.
- Play and recreation areas not protected with fencing.
- Vehicular access not restricted around play areas.

#### Auditor General School Safety Reviews

- Building entrances and exits
- Buses and parking
- Keys and identification
- Deliveries
- Monitoring and surveillance
- Building and grounds security
- Doors and windows
- Communication systems
- Visitor procedures
- Interior security during school hours
- Emergency plans, policies, and procedures

"I will visit schools to meet with students, teachers, parents, law enforcement and school administrators in order to review and make improvements in how our audits can improve the safety of our schools," DePasquale said.

"We need the experience and advice of everyone if we are to ensure our schools are safe havens for student education and safe from dangerous people intent on doing harm," he said. "I especially look forward to hearing the thoughts and ideas of students."

DePasquale said he would also look at how the school construction and renovation process incorporates school safety concerns in planning for those projects.

"Pennsylvania taxpayers spend millions and millions of dollars each year on school construction and renovation," DePasquale said. "School safety must be part of the planning for these projects. To ignore school safety issues in these projects would be flat-out irresponsible."

As part of the stepped-up school safety efforts, DePasquale said he will:

- Immediately add school safety objectives to all school audits and reviews; and
- Expand the distribution of confidential school safety audit results – beyond the current distribution to school superintendents and school safety officers – to include the Pennsylvania State Police, Attorney General and local police departments.

"The most students should ever have to worry about in school is a pop quiz in algebra class," DePasquale said. "Students should never have to worry whether they will be able to survive the school day unharmed. It is up to all of us to make safe schools a reality."

###



## Keep Guns Out of Elementary, Middle, and High Schools

**Bottom Line:** In recent years, the gun lobby has pushed legislation across the country that would arm teachers and allow civilians to carry guns into our elementary, middle and high schools. These bills are sold as a way to keep children safe, but in reality, they do just the opposite, putting children at risk of unintentional shootings and escalating conflict without decreasing the risk of an active shooter. That's why **teachers and school safety experts oppose these bills**. Statehouses should listen to school safety experts and local communities, rather than letting the gun lobby put children's lives at risk.

- ❑ **Teachers and school safety experts oppose allowing guns in schools.**
  - The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, the nation's two largest teachers' organizations, oppose allowing guns in schools.<sup>1</sup>
  - The federal government's chief legal, law enforcement, public health, education, and emergency management agencies all agree that allowing civilians to carry guns in schools is not a sound security practice.<sup>2</sup>
- ❑ **The focus on arming teachers ignores the risks and consequences of bringing more guns onto school grounds.**
  - Everytown has tracked 168 incidents of gunfire on or onto elementary, middle, and high school campuses since 2013. Of those incidents, 1 in 5 were unintentional shootings, and nearly 1 in 6 incidents began as a verbal altercation that escalated because of the presence of a gun. **Introducing guns on school campuses increases the potential for such tragedies.**<sup>3</sup>
  - Schools that have allowed employees to carry guns have seen difficulty in obtaining insurance coverage. Some liability insurance providers have declined coverage to these schools while others have increased annual premiums, stretching already tight budgets.<sup>4</sup>
- ❑ **The gun lobby uses fear of "active shooter" situations to justify these policies, but arming civilians is not an effective way to stop an active shooter.**
  - An FBI review of active shooter incidents from 2000-2013 found that only 1 in 160 incidents ended when a civilian shot the shooter—and that one "civilian" was a former U.S. Marine.<sup>5</sup>
  - While law enforcement officers are extensively trained to handle the chaos and fluctuating dynamics of active shooter situations, civilians are not.<sup>6</sup> Research casts significant doubt on the idea that civilians can shoot as well as trained police officers in active shooter situations.<sup>7</sup>
- ❑ **In fact, armed civilians make active shooter situations more difficult and dangerous. Armed civilians put law enforcement in danger, delay law enforcement response, and pose a risk to innocent bystanders.**
  - Following the shooting of 12 police officers at a demonstration where dozens of open carry activists contributed greatly to police confusion, former Dallas police chief David Brown said, "*We don't know who the good guy is versus the bad guy when everyone starts shooting.*"<sup>8</sup>
  - When a man shot and killed three people at a Walmart in Thornton, Colorado, law enforcement reported shoppers drawing weapons in self-defense "absolutely" slowed the process of identifying the suspect.<sup>9</sup>



- When Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot and injured in Tucson, Arizona, an armed civilian came very close to firing at the unarmed civilian who disarmed the shooter.<sup>10</sup>
- ❑ **Instead of arming teachers, states can save lives by enacting Red Flag laws, creating a way to intervene before a disturbed potential shooter arrives at the schoolhouse door.**
  - Mass shooters like the 19-yr-old in Parkland, Florida often display warning signs before committing violent acts.
  - When a person is a danger to self or others, loved ones and law enforcement are often the first to see signs that they pose a threat. Red Flag Laws allow them to seek help from a court to remove guns from dangerous situations.
  - Red Flag Laws empower law enforcement and immediate family members to petition a court for an Extreme Risk Protection Order, sometimes called a Gun Violence Restraining Order.
  - If a court finds that a person poses a significant danger of injuring themselves or others with a firearm, that person is temporarily prohibited from purchasing and possessing guns and required to turn over their guns while the order is in effect.
  - Red flag laws have been enacted in 5 states,<sup>11</sup> and have been introduced in 18 additional states so far this year.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Education Association. AFT, NEA: Arming educators won't keep schools safe. December 20, 2012. <http://www.nea.org/home/53943.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students. Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans. 2013. [http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS\\_k-12\\_Guide\\_508.pdf](http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_k-12_Guide_508.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. School Shootings In America Since 2013. February, 2018. <https://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/>.

<sup>4</sup> Yaccino S. Schools seeking to arm employees hit hurdle on insurance. *U.S.* August 11, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/08/us/schools-seeking-to-arm-employees-hit-hurdle-on-insurance.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Blair, J. Pete, and Schweit, Katherine W. A Study of Active Shooter Incidents, 2000 - 2013. Texas State University and Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice. 2014. <https://www.hsdj.org/?view&did=757920>.

<sup>6</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police, Active Shooter Model Policy, available at <http://bit.ly/2yFPt7C>; Police Executive Research Forum, The Police Response to Active Shooter Incidents, Critical Issues in Policing Series, Washington D.C., available at <http://bit.ly/1iHbzCV>.

<sup>7</sup> White MD. Hitting the target (or not): Comparing characteristics of fatal, injurious, and Noninjurious police shootings. *Police Quarterly*. 2006;9(3):303-330.; Nieuwenhuys A, Oudejans R. Effects of anxiety on handgun shooting behavior of police officers: A pilot study. *Anxiety, stress, and coping*. 2009;23(2):225-33. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19462309>.

<sup>8</sup> AP News, "Friend or foe? Open-carry law poses challenge to police," July 11, 2016, available at: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/45f4d45b5f874c82a64228aa2ba95639/friend-or-foe-open-carry-law-poses-challenge-police>. See also The Texas Tribune, "After Dallas Ambush, Texas Police to Push for Open Carry Changes, Funding," July 23, 2016 available at: <https://www.texastribune.org/2016/07/23/texas-law-enforcement-groups-brace-gun-funding-leg/>

<sup>9</sup> The Denver Post, "Shoppers pulled guns in response to Thornton Walmart shooting, but police say that slowed investigation," November 2, 2017 <http://www.denverpost.com/2017/11/02/shoppers-pulled-weapons-walmart-shooting/>

<sup>10</sup> Slate, "Gabrielle Giffords and the perils of guns: How an armed hero nearly shot the wrong man," January 11, 2011 [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/human\\_nature/2011/01/friendly\\_firearms.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/human_nature/2011/01/friendly_firearms.html)

<sup>11</sup> Cal. Penal Code §§ 18125, 18150, 18175; Conn. Gen. Stat. § 29-38c; Ind. Code §§ 35-47-14-1, 35-47-14-2, 35-47-14-5, 35-47-14-6, 35-47-14-8; Oregon S. 719, 79th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Or. 2017)(not yet codified); Wash. Rev. Code §§ 7.94.030, 7.94.040, 7.94.050, 7.94.080.

<sup>12</sup> Alaska, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and DC.