



DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG – SECRETARIAT FOR EDUCATION

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Testimony Provided by
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TO

School Safety Hearing
Senate Education and Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees
March 13, 2013

I would like to thank Senator Lisa Baker, Senator Tim Solobay and other members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of School Safety.

My name is Livia Riley, and I am the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Harrisburg. Our diocese is located in central Pennsylvania covering 15 counties. We have 32 elementary schools, 5 high schools, and 2 comprehensive schools, K-12. We serve approximately 11,200 students ranging from Pre-K through 12th grade.

Safety and the security of our students have always been a priority in our schools. As Catholic educators, we value the partnership we have with our families. When the families send their children to school, they expect their children to be embraced by a warm, nurturing and safe environment. But unfortunately on the morning of December 14, 2012, we face the reality that bad things happen. Our nation was horrified and shocked by what took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The infamy of that day will live in our hearts forever. There is not one day that goes by that we do not think about the safety and security of our children.

When our office learned of the Newtown shootings, our Secretary of Education immediately sent out a memo to our schools notifying them of the tragedy and what measures needed to be taken. We were most grateful for the guidance that was shared with our schools by the Pennsylvania State Police Department the following Tuesday. With their guidance, our staff and school boards were able to review their emergency plans. In addition, our principals contacted their local police department to visit their schools and to review their plans seeking their advice. It is customary, for our schools to annually review their school emergency plans. A copy is shared with the local police and fire departments, as well as on file at the diocesan office.

Our schools have taken needed safety measures. All school doors are locked and not accessible to the public during the school day. Many of the schools have monitors at their doors and signs guiding visitors to report to the office immediately. Visitors are requested to sign in, wear a visitor badge whenever they are in the building. Staff members and students are trained to immediately report to the office when a person is not wearing a badge. Many schools have purchased Parent Alert systems to notify parents immediately when a crisis has arisen. In addition, with the building of new school structures or the renovations of the present structure, the projects have focused on school safety by relocating offices and altering design changes.

Additional efforts are made through our **Diocesan Safe Environment Program** in the ***Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People***. All employees, as well as volunteers, must take an on-line training course, have the required clearances required by the state, and wear a diocesan issue badge at all times. Our children are taught safe environment lessons in grade 1, 5, and high school. We also have policies dealing with harassment, sexual harassment, bullying and cyber bullying in place for the protection of our students as well as our staff members.

Our schools will continue to focus on the safety and security of our students. It is unfortunate that our schools can no longer access funds through the Safe School and Drug Free monies. These funds have been used for safety and security equipment such as monitor cameras and fencing for the school grounds providing our schools with additional safety measures. However, we are grateful for the Act 89 services that the state supplies to the nonpublic schools especially with the guidance counseling services. But we could use increased funds when it comes to protecting our schools in the area of mental health, not only for students, but also for families.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this most important topic of school safety with the committee. I look forward to further discussions with you and what we all can do to secure the safety of our children and our school communities.

Livia Riley
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