



THE FLORIDA SENATE
SENATOR KATHLEEN PASSIDOMO
President

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Senators
FROM: Kathleen Passidomo
SUBJECT: Public Safety Legislation
DATE: February 9, 2023

Today Senator Collins will file a robust public safety package to codify the constitutional right of citizens to keep and bear arms and expand tools available to law enforcement and educators working to keep our communities and schools safe.

The bill ensures our laws respect the constitutional rights of law-abiding Floridians while at the same time standardizing processes for school personnel and law enforcement to identify and communicate when a student possesses a significant safety threat, so services and resources can be made available to the parents and student. I chaired our Appropriations Subcommittee on K-12 Education when we created the mental health allocation, and it is important to me that young people have access to these services that will help identify challenges early in life, so students have a chance to make changes that will allow them to succeed as productive and happy adults.

Codifying Constitutional Carry

Constitutional Carry eliminates the need for a concealed weapons license in the state of Florida. As an attorney, a legislator, and now as Senate President, I took an oath to support the Constitution of the United States. It is clear to me that law-abiding Floridians across this state have a constitutional right to keep and bear arms, and should not have to ask the government for permission to protect themselves and their families. My views are also informed by the fact that constitutional carry has broad support from law enforcement leaders charged with safeguarding our communities here at home, as well as decorated veterans of our military, like Speaker Renner and Senator Collins, who have sacrificed greatly to protect our constitutional rights abroad. I stand with these brave warriors, with our law enforcement leaders, and with law-abiding Floridians across this state who should not have to ask the government for permission to protect themselves.

The bill does not affect laws relating to the purchase of a firearm and will not allow anyone prohibited from possessing a firearm to carry concealed. Florida continues to require full and complete background checks when a firearm is purchased. We expanded that requirement in 2018, requiring a three-day waiting period for all kinds of firearms, not just handguns, or until the background check is completed, whichever is later. Moreover, a person carrying concealed without a license will still be required to obey existing laws prohibiting carrying in places like schools, certain athletic events, and correctional facilities, among others.

Expanding Community and School Safety Tools

During my time in the Legislature, we have had many compelling and emotional debates related to school safety, most notably following the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland. The surviving students and the families and friends of the victims have been powerful advocates, and they continue to impact public policy here in Florida and across the country. Over the summer, I worked with Sheriff Bob Gualtieri, of Pinellas County, who is overseeing the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission, to understand his ideas for how we can improve school and community safety, without infringing on the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens.

Specifically, it is important to me that we improve the threat assessment programs utilized by school districts and law enforcement, so there is a clear process for how information about very serious threats can be shared between districts if a child relocates. I do not want minor incidents to follow a good kid around for life, but I certainly do not want an at-risk student who could have been offered important services to fall through the cracks because a family relocates. This bill strikes the right balance.

Additionally, the bill includes a program we have been working on with Sheriff Billy Woods, of Marion County, that would allow more schools across the state to have firearm detection dogs present on campus. These dogs promote school safety as well as positive relationships between students and law enforcement. Further details about this program and other important school safety components of the bill are below.

Expands the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program/Safe School Officers to Private Schools

The bill allows private schools to establish a Guardian Program and participate in the necessary training, provided the school pays for all of the training costs. The bill also allows private schools to assign safe school officers to their facilities.

Active Assailant Response Policy

All law enforcement agencies in Florida must have an active assailant response policy by October 1, 2023, with required annual training.

Standardized Threat Management

The Office of Safe Schools must develop a behavioral threat management operational process which will guide public and charter schools in identifying, assessing, managing, and monitoring potential and real threats. The bill also requires the office to create a Florida specific behavioral threat instrument which will help evaluate the behavior of students who may pose a very serious threat to the school, school staff or students and coordinate intervention and services for the students and parents. When a serious incident or behavior occurs, the school's threat management team must prepare a threat assessment report. The report and all corresponding documentation are education records which are electronically maintained in the threat management portal, which is a secure and confidential portal that will facilitate standardized documentation of threat information. Again the goal is to ensure our kids are safe in school and that troubled students get the help they need before an irreparable incident takes place.

Florida Safe Schools Canine Program

The bill creates the Florida Safe Schools Canine Program for the purpose of designating a person, school, or business entity as a Florida Safe Schools Canine Partner who pays for or raises funds for a law enforcement agency to purchase, train, or care for a firearm detection dog. These dogs contribute to a safe and welcoming school community, furthering a community-wide investment and engagement in school safety and public safety initiatives. The program seeks to foster relationships between schools, local businesses, and law enforcement, promoting trust and confidence in the ability of law enforcement to keep schools and communities safe. Firearm dogs act as liaisons between students and law enforcement agencies and serve as ambassadors for a law enforcement agency to improve community engagement. K-12 schools and students are encouraged to partner with law enforcement to fundraise in the local community for donations to purchase, train, or care for the dog.

As I mentioned above, I appreciate that Senator Collins brings to these issues a perspective gained over more than two decades of decorated service at the highest levels of our military, at great personal cost. He is also the father of two young sons and cares deeply about keeping schools and communities safe for families.

Thank you for your continued attention to this issue. Safety impacts every community and every family in our state, and is the most important issue we face as legislators. I look forward to further discussions on these important issues in the weeks ahead.