

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Education

FROM: Sharon L. Schmeling, Executive Director

DATE: March 20, 2018

RE: Special Session Assembly Bills 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6: School Security

On behalf of 100,000 students in 600 private K-12 schools across the state and the teachers, principals and superintendents who lead them, thank you for taking up the issue of school security.

Our school staff and parents are eager for your leadership on improving school building safety and security. The recent efforts to improve school security are not new. At previous times in our nation's history, public policy has been updated and changed to recognize new threats to our school children.

Sixty years ago, in Chicago, a fire raged through Our Lady of the Angels School in Chicago, killing 92 students and three nuns. Many more were injured when they tried to escape through corridors and stairways. There were inadequate alarms, fire escapes and fire doors. The disaster shocked the nation and surprised administrators of public and private schools. The disaster led to major improvements in standards for school design and fire safety codes.

We can fan the flames of disagreement about guns, and our justified anger and fear over school shootings. But one thing is fireproof: enacting these initiatives before you today will improve school safety for our children, and the adults who guide them.

We worked with Gov. Walker's office in the development of this package and are here to encourage you to move it forward so that it becomes law. We are very grateful it treats public and private schools equitably and acknowledges that all students and schools are worthy of our state's protection. Just as you would not deny public fire or ambulance services to a burning church and its victims, we trust you would not deny these potentially life-saving initiatives from private schools.

We especially support the inclusion of private schools in the grant program provided in **Special Session Assembly Bill 1**. Through security reviews and audits of our schools, security experts have counseled that student safety can be greatly enhanced by improving the quality and strength of doors and locks, by expanding coverage provided by cameras, and by improving school intercom and other early warning systems. This bill makes those improvements more likely and possible.

The creation of an office of School Safety provided in **Special Session Assembly Bill 2** also merits support. While the vast majority of our schools conduct safety training exercises, Principals report there is a lack of common understanding of what is adequate, sufficient or best practice when carrying these out. An office of School Safety would help decrease uncertainty and confusion about such exercises.

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Association of Christian
Schools International

Christian Schools
International

Diocese of Green Bay

Diocese of LaCrosse

Diocese of Madison

Diocese of Superior

Lutheran Church
Missouri Synod
North Wisconsin District

Lutheran Church
Missouri Synod
South Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Association
of Independent Schools

Wisconsin Conference
of Seventh Day Adventists

Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
Northern Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
Western Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
Southeastern Wisconsin
District

Associate Members

PHONE
(608) 287-1224

E-MAIL
wcris.staff@gmail.com

WEBSITE
www.wcris.org

ADDRESS
110 East Main Street
Suite 802
Madison, WI 53703

Many of our schools already have safety plans in place and share their floor plans with First Responders. The requirement in **Special Session Assembly Bill 5** to tighten safety plans and create a more comprehensive system of collecting and sharing that information is prudent and one we support.

When deadly violence enters our schools, we all ask why? We know why: there is murder in the heart of the perpetrator. We need to be asking, why are there so many murderous hearts? This is the challenge our school leaders are working on every day, as we shape the character and values of the children in our care towards love and serving the common good. But just as these violent tendencies didn't erupt overnight in our society, they will not be extinguished quickly, either.

So, therefore today, we urge you to approve this package of legislation. It is a good effort that will improve the safety and security of our school children. Please advance it through the legislative process so we can take advantage of the support it provides.