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BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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I. Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member King, and all the members of the Committee for inviting the Department of Education to come and share with you what we are doing in the area of emergency management as it relates to schools.

On behalf of Secretary Spellings I compliment you on your focus on the issues that are the subject of today's hearing, as well as the many actions you have taken prior to today. Whether we are parents or not, we are all touched by the lives of children. Childhood is a time of innocence, learning, and experiencing new things and we are deeply troubled when that innocence is shattered by senseless tragedy. When parents send their children off to school or college they expect them to be safe. And when horrible events like the recent shootings on Virginia Tech's campus happen, we are shaken to our core and need to take time, as a nation, to grieve for what we lost that day.

As you know, in response to the shootings at Virginia Tech, President Bush directed Secretary Spellings, Secretary Leavitt, and Attorney General Gonzales to travel to communities across our nation, to meet with educators, mental health experts, and State and local officials to discuss issues raised by this tragedy. This effort is under way, and some very productive meetings have been held. The President instructed Secretary Leavitt to summarize the information gathered at the series of meetings and report back with recommendations about how the Federal Government can help States and communities avoid such tragedies in the future.

But the events like those at Virginia Tech also require that we redouble our efforts to make schools even safer. As President Bush said, "Schools should be places of safety and sanctuary and learning. When that sanctuary is violated, the impact is felt in every American classroom and every American community."

I want to start by mentioning a few key facts and principles about schools and school safety.

Schools are safe places for students to be. While even one murder or one assault or robbery is too many, schools generally are much safer than the communities in which they are located. For many students, schools remain safe havens, places they can go to get away from violence.

Schools can't create safe learning environments by themselves. They need to establish partnerships with a variety of local organizations and agencies, including law enforcement, health and mental health organizations, faith-based groups, youth-serving organizations, parent groups, and student groups.

Issues related to the safety and security of our Nation's schools are primarily a State and local responsibility. While the Department of Education and other Federal agencies have an important role to play in helping make schools safer, that role is a limited one. Our priority is to have the greatest impact that we can, given the limited nature of our role.

II. Mission of the Department and of Schools

The mission of the Department of Education is to promote student achievement by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. We work to supplement and complement the efforts of States, local school systems, and others to improve the quality of education.

We believe that supporting the efforts of States and localities to create safe and secure learning environments is a critical part of that mission. We know that while schools generally are safe and shootings are rare, we can and must work to make them even safer. When schools are not safe, when children are compromised because of drugs or alcohol, or when children are afraid to go to school because of bullying, the educational experience is diminished and academic achievement will be limited. Research on academic achievement indicates that students must first feel safe and secure and be healthy in order to have the best chance to be successful in school.

While the mission of schools is to teach all students to the highest possible standards, we know that teachers can't teach and students can't learn to their fullest extent if they are not safe or if they don't feel safe. In order to help students maximize their academic potential, schools need to create a climate which not only promotes learning but does so in an atmosphere where:

- inappropriate behaviors such as bullying are not tolerated;
- students are held responsible for their actions and are sanctioned consistent with discipline policies;
- the illegal possession of alcohol, drugs, and firearms is strictly prohibited;
- threats against schools, faculty, and students are diligently investigated; and
- all students feel connected to their school and know that they have a place to turn for help and advice.

III. ED Emergency Management Activities

To help create safe schools, ED's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) carries out a broad range of activities. We provide support to States, local educational agencies, and community-based organizations through a formula-grant program, and also administer a series of competitive grant initiatives. We also carry out a range of national leadership activities with funds appropriated under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act National

Programs authority. We use these funds to support activities including training, technical assistance, data collection and dissemination, program development, and program support.

Many of these activities are developed and implemented in coordination and collaboration with a variety of other offices within ED, as well as with other Federal agencies and private organizations that serve youth. We work regularly with other Federal agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security, including the United States Secret Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Homeland Security Institute, and other offices and councils; the Department of Health and Human Services, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; the Department of Justice, including the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and the Office of National Drug Control Policy. We also work closely with a variety of private non-profit youth serving organizations, such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Details about some of the activities we carry out that are directly related to readiness and emergency management for schools follow.

Safe School Initiative:

I am going to let Mr. Sica, the Special Agent in Charge of the United States Secret Service (USSS), National Threat Assessment Center describe the joint USSS and ED effort under this initiative in more detail. Our collective efforts as part of the Safe School Initiative include development of a Final Report on Targeted School Shootings; a Threat Assessment Guide; an interactive CD-ROM “A Safe School and Threat Assessment Experience: Scenarios Exploring the Findings of the Safe School Initiative”; a study on students that were aware of planned school shootings and took no action (in draft); and threat assessment trainings (339 sessions to over 77,000 persons). We believe that these activities have proven to be very valuable to schools around the country.

Project SERV

A key function of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools is to help school districts provide education-related services and restore the learning environment after a violent or traumatic crisis. Project School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV) is the Department of Education’s primary funding source for this purpose.

Experience has taught us that responding adequately to school-based traumatic events requires both an immediate and a continuing component. Project SERV is designed to ensure a continuum of post-incident services through two different tiers of funding: Immediate Services and Extended Services. Under the first tier (Immediate Services), we provide emergency, short-term assistance to affected school districts; under the second (Extended Services), we assist school districts in meeting their longer-term needs in responding to the crisis.

Immediate Services grants are intended to provide support very quickly following an incident. Immediate Services grants under Project SERV generally are for a maximum amount of \$50,000 over a six-month period. Applications received for Immediate Services grants are given priority

and undergo an expedited review. Extended Services grants are intended to address the long-term recovery efforts that may be needed following a significant, traumatic event. They generally provide a maximum of \$250,000 over a period of up to 18 months to help maintain safety and security in an affected school and to help students, teachers, school staff, and family members recover from the event.

Since the program's inception in 2001, the Department has awarded \$24.9 million in grants under Project SERV to 34 school districts and nine States. These grants have included 45 Immediate Services and nine Extended Services grants. Funds have been awarded to districts in response to events such as school shootings and student suicides. In addition, Project SERV funds were awarded in response to large-scale events such as 9/11, the Washington, D.C., area sniper incidents, and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Project SERV funds have enabled schools to restore a critical sense of safety and security after a crisis. Funds have been used for mental health services, additional security services and temporary security measures, training for staff, and other services needed to restore the learning environment.

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools

In addition to supporting schools that are *recovering* from traumatic events, we support schools as they *plan* for potential crises. We administer the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) competitive grant program to provide funds to local educational agencies to improve and strengthen their emergency management plans. Since 2003, OSDFS has awarded 413 grants under this program totaling over \$112 million for K-12 school preparedness. Funds are used to support emergency management plan development incorporating the four phases of emergency management: Prevention-Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. Grant funds enable schools to work closely with local community partners and first responders, as well as to provide training on emergency procedures, conduct practice drills, and purchase supplies to support their emergency management efforts.

We also provide additional resources to support school preparedness efforts. Our *Practical Information on Crisis Planning Guide* provides schools and their communities with a general introduction to emergency management as it applies to schools and basic guidelines for developing school emergency management plans. In addition, since 2004, we have supported an Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center that is available to support schools in their development of all-hazards emergency management plans. The Center supports a Web site and offers a series of school-based emergency management publications and training sessions to the public. Also, in an effort to provide crisis planning information to an audience beyond REMS grantees, we provide training on emergency management planning for non-grantees twice a year. These training activities have included attendees from more than 40 States. Our most recent session was held in St. Louis earlier in May.

DHS/NIPP

OSDFS has been working with the Department of Homeland Security on protective efforts related to schools for several years. In the summer of 2006, the category of Education Facilities, which includes all schools and institutions of higher education, became a sub-sector within the

Government Facilities Sector as part of the National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP) effort. As part of this change, we are responsible for providing information to DHS on school and university protective efforts. We also coordinate school protective efforts with a number of other offices within DHS, including the Office of Infrastructure Protection, which leads the coordinated national effort to reduce the risk to our critical infrastructures and key resources posed by acts of terrorism, and the Office of Risk Management and Analysis, which leads DHS' efforts to establish a common framework to address the overall management and analysis of homeland security risk.

We also participate in other homeland security-related activities, including working groups involved in the interagency review of the National Response Plan (NRP) and National Incident Management System (NIMS), and provide senior-level representation on the NIPP Federal Senior Leadership Council and the Homeland Security Council's Domestic Readiness Group.

White House Conference on School Safety

In October of 2006, the White House convened a Conference on School Safety in response to a series of tragic shootings that took place in our Nation's schools. The conference was designed to provide an opportunity for educators, law enforcement officials, mental health providers, representatives of community-based organizations, parents, and students to come together to share strategies for preventing violence and learn from one another.

Because school violence is a complex problem, requiring a comprehensive approach, panelists and participants discussed a wide range of topics, including:

- research about the nature and extent of school violence;
- ways in which law enforcement, schools, and others can work together to establish safe environments and prevent school shootings;
- emergency management planning activities that help schools prepare to respond to violent acts and other crises; and
- strategies to help school communities heal and recover if and when a violent incident occurs.

As a follow-up to the Conference, the Department disseminated materials on emergency management preparedness to all public and private elementary and secondary schools, including a message from the Secretary summarizing the conference content and the *Practical Information on Crisis Planning* brochure.

We hosted a special web cast on November 15 to review emergency planning and suggest strategies to help schools mitigate, prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a crisis. Nearly 3,900 people successfully participated in the live event in November, and, by the end of 2006, about 2,600 additional individuals downloaded the archive Web cast.

In December, the Secret Service and ED released a new interactive CD-ROM, *A Safe School and Threat Assessment Experience: Scenarios Exploring the Findings of the Safe School Initiative*, designed to complement the existing Threat Assessment Guide. As Mr. Sica mentioned, this CD-ROM, which included a copy of the Threat Assessment Guide and final report of the SSI,

was distributed to chief state school officers, key education associations, Safe School Centers, and School Security Chiefs in January 2007.

We updated our crisis-planning guide and mailed the revised information to chief state school officers, key education associations, Safe School Centers, and School Security Chiefs on April 19, 2007.

Chiefs of School Police

ED staff meets regularly with the head safety and security officials from the Nation's 40 largest school districts. These face-to-face meetings provide the Department with a better understanding of the problems confronting the Nation's schools and allow the safety and security officials to share information about issues facing their particular school districts. We have also established a list serv for the group that allows the Department and the security officials to engage in dialogue on various issues related to school safety and security, school crime, and emerging concerns.

NOAA Public Alert Radios

Since 2005, the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools has collaborated with the Departments of Homeland Security and Commerce to provide NOAA Public Alert Radios to schools. Since 2005, 97,000 radios have been distributed to public schools in the country.

Information on these initiatives and the various products I've mentioned is available on the Department's web site www.ed.gov by clicking on "school safety".

IV. Other Related Activities

The Department of Education also implements several other programs and initiatives that, while not designed to immediately address readiness and emergency management concerns, do play an important role in efforts to create safe and supportive school climates. Details about some of these activities follow.

Safe Schools/Healthy Students

A joint project of the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative provides grants to local school districts to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to create safe school environments and support healthy youth development. Local school districts that receive grants under the initiative are required to enter into partnerships with juvenile justice and law enforcement officials, as well as the local public mental health authority as part of the initiative.

Character Education

The Partnerships in Character Education Program helps create a school climate that is safe and caring. Since 1995, the goal of this grant program has been to bring schools, parents, students, and the community together to implement a community-wide character education program. To date, we have made 139 partnership grants to State educational agencies and local school districts totaling more than \$121,500,000. Research studies posted on the U. S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse Web site show that character education is linked to improved character development, pro-social behavior and academic achievement.

School Associated Violent Death Study

Since 1992, the Department of Education has assisted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in collecting information about school-associated violent deaths in order to identify trends that can help schools develop preventive measures that protect and promote the health, safety and development of all students. Although school-associated violent deaths remain rare events, they have occurred often enough to begin to detect patterns and identify potential risk factors. The data has provided important information about the characteristics of homicides, homicide perpetrators and the context of a homicide event to help inform potential homicide prevention strategies and activities. Results from the ongoing study are available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

Gun-Free Schools Act

The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) requires that each State or outlying area receiving Federal funds under the ESEA have a law that requires all local educational agencies to expel from school for at least one year any student who takes a firearm to school or possesses a firearm at school. State laws also must authorize the local school superintendent to modify, in writing, any such expulsion on a case-by-case basis. In addition, the GFSA states that the law must be construed so as to be consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The GFSA requires States and outlying areas to report information about the implementation of the GFSA annually to the Secretary of Education. We summarize reports from the States and produce an annual report that is released to the public. The reports are not designed to provide information regarding the rate at which students carry firearms to school or possess firearms at school. Rather, the data summarized in the report relate to actions taken with regard to the number of students *found* bringing firearms to schools or possessing firearms at schools.

The most recently released report contains data from the 2002-2003 school year. That report indicates that the States (including the District of Columbia and the territories) expelled 2,143 students for bringing a firearm to school or possessing a firearm at school. More than half of the expulsions (58 percent) were in senior high schools and 11 percent were for elementary school students. Fifty-five percent of expulsions were for bringing or possessing a handgun, and 13 percent were for bringing or possessing a rifle or shotgun. The remaining 32 percent of expulsions were for other firearms or destructive devices such as bombs or grenades.

Additional details about all of these initiatives are available at the Department's website, www.ed.gov.

V. Reauthorization

While many local school districts have made strides toward creating safe and drug-free learning environments, it is clear, based on the results of the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) review, as well as our experience in administering the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act provisions, that we must do better. The 2006 PART for the Safe and Drug Free Schools State Grant Program found the structure of this program is still flawed, spreading funding too broadly to support quality interventions and failing to target those schools and

communities in greatest need of assistance. As part of the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, we propose restructuring the Safe and Drug-Free State Grants program in order to better serve schools and communities. Specifically, we propose making Safe and Drug-Free Schools State Grants funds available to States to support training, technical assistance, and information for schools about the most effective models and strategies to create safe, healthy, and secure schools.

A key difference between our proposed approach and the current Safe and Drug-Free Schools State Grants program is that our reauthorization proposal would focus on building State capacity to assist schools adopt and implement effective models that, to the extent possible, reflect scientifically based research. While States would be authorized to make subgrants to local school districts, these awards would not be made based on a statutory formula, but rather in response to demonstrated need for assistance.

Our reauthorization proposal would complement these changes to the Safe and Drug-Free Schools State Grants program with revisions to the SDFS National Programs authority. We propose consolidating SDFS-National Programs into a single and flexible discretionary grant program that would be focused on four priority areas – emergency management planning; preventing violence and drug use, including student drug testing; school culture and climate, including character education; and other needs related to improving the learning environment to help students meet high academic standards.

Our proposed approach would replace an array of narrowly conceived, but sometimes overlapping-authorities with a single program focused on critical areas of national concern. It would provide the flexibility that we need to respond to new and emerging needs in school safety and drug prevention, and provide potential grantees with the opportunity to develop more comprehensive proposals rather than piecing together activities from multiple grant streams, requiring multiple application notices, implementation rules, and reporting and accountability requirements.

V. Closing

In conclusion, I want to return to where I began. Schools are generally safe, but all of us – Federal, State and local government organizations, community-based organizations, and parents and students – share the responsibility to work to make them safer. I believe that by working together we can do so. Thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to working with you on these issues.