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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
FEDERAL COMMISSION ON SCHOOL SAFETY

PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION

U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue Southwest
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Reported by: Samuel Honig,
Capital Reporting Company

1 A P P E A R A N C E S

2 C O M M I S S I O N R E P R E S E N T A T I V E S

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4 Director, Protective Security Coordination

5 Division, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

6 Todd Klessman

7 Infrastructure Security Compliance Division, U.S.

8 Department of Homeland Security

9 Elinore McCance-Katz

10 Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and

11 Substance Abuse, U.S. Department of Health and

12 Human Services

13 Meredith Miller

14 U.S. Department of Education

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18 Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legal

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 WELCOME/INTRODUCTION

3 DR. ZAIS: If we could have people take a
4 seat, we'll get started. Good morning. On behalf of
5 Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, I'd like to thank
6 you all for attending our first listening session of
7 the Federal Commission on School Safety. My name is
8 Mick Zais. I'm the deputy secretary of education.

9 As you know, the president formed this
10 commission in the wake of the shooting at Marjory
11 Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and
12 sadly this was not an isolated incident.

13 As Secretary DeVos subsequently noted, the
14 tragedies at Noblesville West Middle School in Indiana
15 and Santa Fe High School in Texas were only the most
16 recent devastating reminders that our nation needs to
17 come together to address the underlying causes that
18 create a culture of violence.

19 Across the country, students, parents and
20 educators are concerned that something similar could
21 happen in their own schools. That's why President
22 Trump took prompt action instructing the agencies here

1 to immediately work with the states and local schools
2 to improve school security, expand access to mental
3 health programs and invest in violence prevention.

4 The commission has been charged to identify
5 best practices and to provide actionable
6 recommendations to keep students safe in school.

7 Naturally the primary responsibility for the physical
8 security of schools rests with states and local
9 communities.

10 There's no one size fits all approach and each
11 state and every community must develop their own
12 solutions. That's why open and public discussions and
13 listening sessions such as these are so important.

14 The commission is comprised of the secretary
15 of education, Betsy DeVos, who is the commission chair,
16 Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Secretary of Health and
17 Human Services Alex Azar and Secretary of Homeland
18 Security Kirstjen Nielsen.

19 I'd like to introduce the representatives from
20 each of these agencies who are on the stage with me.

21 The Department of Justice is represented by Beth
22 Williams, the assistant attorney general for the office

1 of legal policy. You want to raise your hand? Thank
2 you.

3 The Department of Health and Human Services is
4 represented by Dr. Elinore McCance-Katz, the assistant
5 secretary for mental health and substance use.

6 This morning, the Department of Homeland
7 Security is represented by Scott Breor, the director of
8 the Protective Security Coordination Division.

9 This afternoon, Homeland Security will be
10 represented by Todd Klessman, the senior counselor to
11 the undersecretary for national protection and programs
12 directorate.

13 On March 28th of this year, the commission
14 held an organizational meeting to help begin planning
15 their work. They decided to host a series of meetings,
16 site visits and listening sessions over the next
17 several months.

18 Formal commission meetings will provide a
19 forum for subject matter experts, individuals affected
20 by school violence and other key stakeholders to
21 provide input and testimony. We plan to host four
22 formal commission meetings over the next four months.

1 Before our first formal commission meeting
2 however, Commissioner Betsy DeVos hosted a meeting and
3 a discussion on May 17th to hear from survivors and
4 family members affected by the mass shootings -- that
5 were written in the wake of those shootings. Field
6 visits will involve travel to schools and other sites
7 to observe and learn about best practices in school
8 safety.

9 Each formal commission meeting will have an
10 associated field visit. The first field visits
11 occurred on May 31st at Frank Hebron-Harman Elementary
12 School in Hanover, Maryland.

13 Commission members and their representatives
14 heard from administrators, principals, teachers,
15 students and a national expert on the positive
16 behavioral interventions and support program. This is
17 a framework that's designed to improve social-emotional
18 and academic outcomes for all students.

19 Listening sessions will occur in several
20 regions of the country and will provide opportunities
21 for the general public to be heard. This is our first
22 listening session.

1 We are also collecting ideas and input on
2 school safety from the public in another way. Everyone
3 is encouraged to send their insights and
4 recommendations to the email address `safety@ed.gov`.
5 That's `safety@ed.gov`.

6 Here's how today will play out. Today's
7 listening session will be split into a morning and an
8 afternoon session. There'll be a 15-minute break at 11
9 o'clock this morning, a lunch hour starting at 12:30
10 and another 15-minute break at 2:45. The meeting will
11 end at 4:30.

12 Those of you who registered to speak will
13 provide your views on how schools, districts,
14 institutions of higher education and other local and
15 state agencies can improve school safety.

16 We have you seated in the order in which you
17 will speak. When it's your turn, please come to the
18 left side of the stage. You will be introduced by a
19 member of our staff and then you will then proceed to
20 the podium, introduce yourself and give your remarks.

21 You will have five minutes to speak. The
22 light at the top of the podium will turn yellow when

1 you have one minute left. It will turn red when your
2 five minutes have elapsed and your time is up.

3 I apologize in advance if I have to ask you to
4 wrap up your remarks. We understand that passions run
5 high. But we also need to be fair to everyone and let
6 everyone who's registered to speak have an opportunity
7 to do so.

8 We are here to listen to your views. We won't
9 be answering questions or providing feedback. And I
10 would remind everyone that our focus is on school
11 safety, not other policy matters.

12 Please note that we are livestreaming this
13 event. In addition, we will post a transcript of this
14 listening session to our commission's website at
15 ed.gov.

16 Thank you again for your interest in this
17 important topic and, for our speakers, thank you for
18 your willingness to contribute.

19 If you'd like further information on our
20 meetings, our site visits and listening sessions,
21 please check out the commission's website. So let's
22 get started.

1 PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION

2 MORNING SESSION

3 MS. MILLER: Congressman Rutherford?

4 REP. RUTHERFORD: Thank you, Commissioners. I
5 am known on the Hill as Sheriff John Rutherford. I was
6 in law enforcement for 41 years and 12 of those as
7 sheriff.

8 And I want to thank you for this opportunity
9 to come and present to the commission today on what
10 we've been doing in Congress, some of what we've been
11 doing in Congress to help keep our schools safe.

12 Sadly, we continue to hear of horrific
13 tragedies of violence taking place in schools across
14 the country, including Parkland, Florida -- my state --
15 and most recently, Santa Fe, Texas. This violence in
16 our schools must stop. Our students have a right to go
17 to school and feel safe in their classroom each and
18 every day.

19 As I used to tell my community when I was
20 sheriff, I don't want to be the best first responder to
21 a mass casualty event. I want to prevent the event
22 before it occurs. And so, security always requires a

1 multilayered approach, beginning with prevention. And
2 this applies as well to school safety.

3 And for that reason, I, working with the Sandy
4 Hook Promise Group and others, introduced the Stop
5 Schools Violence Act of 2018 this past January which
6 focused federal resources on preventing school
7 violence.

8 And our bill, which was signed into law by
9 President Trump this past March, authorized \$100
10 million annually through the Department of Justice for
11 local schools to do four things.

12 Number one, implement programs that train
13 students, teachers and officers, the warning signs of
14 an individual with a propensity to become a violent
15 school shooter.

16 Number two, to provide anonymous tip lines so
17 that those teachers, students and officers who come
18 across this information have an anonymous way of
19 providing that to the authorities.

20 And number three, creating networks between
21 law enforcement, our educational administrators and the
22 mental health community, as you mentioned earlier.

1 That's a very important working relationship I think
2 that we have to have developed within our schools, a
3 network.

4 And fourth, providing for the safety through
5 the hardening of the target by utilizing crime
6 prevention through CPTED. It's crime prevention
7 through environmental design. It existed some years
8 ago. There's still a lot of technical information out
9 there about CPTED and including down to armed security
10 in our schools.

11 Now that that law has passed and the money has
12 been appropriated by Congress, we need to make this
13 funding available to our schools as soon as possible to
14 make sure that DOJ knows just how important this
15 funding is to our school safety.

16 We recently sent a letter, along with 60 of my
17 House colleagues, asking for DOJ's quick action to get
18 these grants out the door and into our communities.
19 States, localities and tribes need DOJ's quick action
20 in order to implement effective and thoughtful
21 proposals before students return from their summer
22 break. We cannot let sluggish bureaucracy slow this

1 down.

2 I sincerely appreciate this administration's
3 continued attention to school security, including the
4 creation of the School Safety Commission, and I look
5 forward to seeing what you achieve through the
6 commission.

7 And please know that you have many of us ready
8 and willing to do whatever we may to help you in this
9 endeavor. And I will close -- I'm over my time, is
10 that right?

11 DR. ZAIS: Go ahead, sir.

12 REP. RUTHERFORD: Okay. Thank you. I would
13 say this in closing. I think we need to look at why
14 these individuals go back to their school to kill their
15 fellow inmates.

16 Think about that. They don't go to the
17 grocery store and kill everybody. They don't go to the
18 mall and kill folks. They go back to their school.
19 And I think we need to look at what is going on in this
20 individual's environment, what's going on in their home
21 environment, their school environment and then our
22 overall community environments, that I believe these

1 kids go to these schools to kill because they perceive
2 in their mind that that is the source of their pain in
3 their life. And they go there to kill the pain in
4 their life.

5 And that's why my bill focuses on identifying
6 these individuals before they feel that need to strike
7 out against their classmates.

8 And I would also suggest to you a program that
9 we had in Jacksonville, Florida was called Project Safe
10 Students in Schools, which focused on those most
11 disruptive students in a school, major problems that
12 they were having.

13 We identified those individuals, not for
14 enforcement. We identified them for services. And we
15 then wrapped a lot of services around these
16 individuals.

17 And our serious student misconduct dropped I
18 think it was 43 percent in the first year after that
19 program, working through our school resources officers,
20 working with those in the school and our mental health
21 community.

22 So I thank you for this opportunity to be here

1 and share with you and look forward to helping you in
2 the future. Thank you.

3 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Representative
4 Rutherford.

5 MR. RUTHERFORD: Thank you.

6 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Evie
7 Unsworth, from the Council of Parent Attorneys and
8 Advocates.

9 MS. UNSWORTH: Hi. Evie Unsworth, with COPAA.
10 Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the
11 commission.

12 I'm here today on behalf of the Council of
13 Parent Attorneys and Advocates, COPAA, a nonprofit
14 organization of parents, attorneys, advocates and
15 related professionals whose members work in communities
16 across the United States to protect the civil rights
17 and secure excellence in education on behalf of the 6.8
18 million children with disabilities.

19 As the commission proceeds with its charge to
20 provide meaningful and actionable recommendations to
21 keep students safe at school, COPAA would like the
22 commission to consider the following. First, since it

1 is the commission's charge to keep students safe at
2 school, COPAA urges the commission to expand its
3 membership to include public school parents, teachers
4 and students that truly represent the schools for which
5 you will make the recommendations.

6 Second, we call your attention to the well-
7 documented facts that students with disabilities are
8 significantly and disproportionately impacted by harsh
9 disciplinary actions taken in schools.

10 While students with disabilities comprise just
11 12 percent of the overall student populations, school
12 level reported data show that they represent 24 percent
13 of students who are expelled, 51 percent of students
14 harassed or bullied, 66 percent of all students
15 secluded and 71 percent of all students restrained.

16 These data are overwhelming and sobering
17 because we know that in the many schools reporting
18 these data to the U.S. Department of Education, there
19 is a single child reflected in every number and each
20 child has been on the receiving end of a harsh bullying
21 or disciplinary action. Such action taken towards the
22 child is most likely the result of discrimination and

1 bias.

2 The data also show that students of color with
3 disabilities experience the highest rates of exclusion.
4 Notably most out-of-school suspensions are for minor
5 infractions of school rules such as disrupting class,
6 tardiness and dress code violations rather than for
7 serious violent or criminal behavior.

8 The commission should also not ignore that
9 states are falling short in their obligation to monitor
10 school districts in meeting all obligations under the
11 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, including
12 the law's requirements for manifest determination
13 requirements, functional behavior assessments and
14 behavior intervention plans and more.

15 Our continued concern is that in the case of
16 disciplinary removal, schools are not adequately
17 providing functional behavior assessments and behavior
18 intervention programs and that too often the behavior
19 intervention plans are sloppily written and poorly
20 implemented.

21 With the staggering number of disciplinary
22 actions taken towards students with disabilities, it's

1 clear that students and districts know they have the
2 right under current law to develop their own programs
3 to manage behavior.

4 Specifically, the existing guidance on school
5 discipline has helped states and school districts
6 develop programs to incorporate a wide range of
7 strategies that reduce misbehavior and maintain a safe
8 learning environment, including the provision of
9 training for school teams in conflict resolution,
10 restorative practices, counseling and mental health
11 services and implementing school-wide systems of
12 positive interventions that research and practice show
13 are effective.

14 Without these tools, our most vulnerable
15 children will return to being at a greater risk for
16 suffering from isolation, rejection, stigmatization and
17 criminalization.

18 Exclusionary approaches like suspension and
19 expulsion result too often in alienated young people
20 without the skills to survive in society. Students who
21 display warning signs or dangerous behaviors need
22 appropriate services and supports, not exclusion and

1 rejection.

2 There is no evidence whatsoever that
3 eliminating the protection of the civil rights of
4 students with disabilities or students of color will
5 reduce school shootings. Instead of focusing on the
6 elimination of the actions of the previous
7 administration, this administration should focus on
8 strengthening and improving it.

9 Finally, COPAA would like to remind the
10 commission that what the federal government does and
11 says matters. Rescinding the current discipline
12 guidance will harm our most vulnerable children.

13 We ask that the commission will not repeal the
14 "rethink school discipline" guidance and instead work
15 to promote strong district and school-wide positive
16 behavioral support programs. Our children's lives
17 depend on it. Thank you.

18 DR. ZAIS: Thank you.

19 MS. MILLER: Thank you. Next, we'll hear from
20 Edward Clarke, Maryland Center for School Safety.

21 MR. CLARKE: Good morning, members of the
22 commission. My name is Edward Clarke. I'm the

1 executive director of the Maryland Center for School
2 Safety.

3 The Maryland Center for School Safety was
4 created by the Maryland legislature following the
5 horrific tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Our
6 mission is to have a coordinated and comprehensive
7 approach to school safety and security for all of our
8 Maryland schools, both public and private.

9 The issues of school safety and emergency
10 preparedness are certainly complex and not one-
11 dimensional. The recent and ongoing incidents of
12 school shootings has shaken us all to our very core.

13 On March 20th of this year, Maryland
14 experienced our own school shooting where a student at
15 Great Mills High School shot and killed a fellow
16 student.

17 The Great Mills High School staff, students
18 and parents and the community of St. Mary's County are
19 still grieving the loss of a young and vibrant student,
20 Jaelynn Willey, and they are now on the path to a long
21 road of recovery.

22 I want to thank the U.S. Department of

1 Justice, Office of Safe and Healthy Schools for
2 supporting the Great Mills school community and
3 awarding them a Project SERV grant to help them in the
4 path of recovery. And I hope that those grants
5 continue. They are very, very helpful to schools who
6 have experienced crises and tragedies.

7 School safety is everyone responsibility and
8 we have to work together to identify best and promising
9 practices. We have to increase the physical security
10 of our schools while also ensuring we have a supportive
11 climate and culture, proper critical incident response
12 training for staff, students and parents and a shared
13 commitment for school safety and security.

14 We have to also do a better job in the area of
15 mental health for our students and attempt to identify
16 those students and others who may be a pathway of
17 targeted school violence through prevention and
18 intervention efforts.

19 I hope that the federal funding and resources
20 to help all of our schools across this country are
21 there and can be used by our schools to ensure that our
22 collective mission of creating a safe and supportive

1 learning environment where all students can obtain a
2 high quality education. Those resources and fundings
3 are very, very important.

4 I also hope and encourage the commission that
5 you will reinstate the readiness and emergency
6 management grants that were available in the early
7 years of 2000 through the mid-2000 years.

8 These grants helped school districts, schools
9 across the country to be better prepared for a
10 multitude of emergencies and crises and to take an all
11 hazards approach to school safety and emergency
12 preparedness.

13 Our governor, Governor Hogan, this year,
14 working with the legislature, we enhanced school safety
15 and security with the passage of the Safe to Learn Act
16 of 2018.

17 It does provide funding for school safety and
18 security. But it also provides increased training of
19 our school resource officers, as well as our school
20 security staff throughout the state of Maryland, also
21 focusing on mental health improvements for our students
22 there.

1 Again, I would just like to say that we are
2 all in this collectively together. One size doesn't
3 fit all. So we need to look to our federal partners to
4 work with our states and our local communities to make
5 sure all of our schools, whether they be public,
6 nonpublic or private, are a safe, supportive
7 environment.

8 If I or the Maryland Center for School Safety
9 can be of any assistance, please do hesitate to call on
10 us and we thank you for your very important work to
11 make sure that all of our schools continue to remain a
12 safe, supportive learning environment for all of our
13 children. Thank you.

14 DR. ZAIS: Thank you.

15 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Alessia
16 Modjarrad.

17 MS. MODJARRAD: Good morning. My name is
18 Alessia Modjarrad and I am a graduating senior at
19 Poolesville High School in Montgomery County, Maryland
20 and a student organizer with MoCo students for gun
21 control.

22 I am here in support of commonsense gun

1 legislation as it relates to school safety. Since the
2 Parkland shooting in February, students like myself
3 have been at the forefront of the movement for gun
4 control.

5 We have asked for universal background checks,
6 bans on high capacity magazines, a lift of the Dickey
7 amendment, mental health care reform and so much more.

8 The current administration put forth a few
9 policy points but efforts have been simply misguided
10 and insufficient. In order to get any policy with real
11 meaning behind it, legislators must take the student
12 voice and amplify it.

13 We, the students, experience the American
14 school system every day. We used to sit in classrooms
15 waiting for something to be done. Now, we will use our
16 voice and it's time for the commission to listen.

17 I don't want to be scared. I don't want to
18 think that at any moment, someone with a gun could walk
19 in and hurt us all. I don't want to go to college this
20 August and worry that my 14-year-old brother might be
21 victim to a preventable death. And when I say
22 preventable, I mean it and so do other likeminded

1 Americans that support our cause.

2 Without a legally obtained assault rifle, far
3 fewer than 17 students and teachers would be still
4 alive in Parkland. Might I emphasize legally? In
5 fact, 82 percent of weapons used in mass shootings in
6 the last 30 years were obtained legally, according to a
7 Mother Jones database.

8 Why are we allowing guns to fall into the
9 hands of dangerous people? Why are we allowing our
10 government to be so strongly influenced by NRA-backed
11 lobbyists at the expense of American lives?

12 Simply put, the victims of the Santa Fe High
13 School shooting were not killed by doors, trench coats
14 or a lack of school resource officers. Neither were
15 any of the other victims of the mass shootings we have
16 somehow grown to expect in this country we are
17 supposedly so proud of.

18 No other country has this same issue with
19 school shootings that we do, and we know why. No other
20 country in the world has the same proliferation and
21 culture of guns as the United States of America. The
22 United States of America owns 112.6 guns for every

1 hundred people.

2 The only other country with over 40 guns for
3 every hundred people in the top hundred countries in
4 GDP per capita is Switzerland, a country with mandatory
5 military service and extremely strict laws on storage
6 and use of firearms and ammunition.

7 To say that guns and shootings are not linked
8 is frankly preposterous. Every other country has
9 doors, videogames, mental illness and psychoactive
10 medications. But only the U.S. has a gun violence
11 epidemic within our schools.

12 Gun violence and its relation to school safety
13 requires a multifaceted, intersectional approach.
14 Please know we will take our freshly minted power to
15 the polls this year and every year until our fight is
16 met with comprehensive legislation that actually makes
17 our schools safer, not into death traps or prisons.

18 When asked whether guns would be considered by
19 this commission today, Secretary DeVos said that is not
20 part of the commission's charge, per se. I would ask
21 to please consider the possibilities that guns are the
22 most important aspect of the purview of this

1 commission.

2 So I'd like to ask secretary DeVos and the
3 federal commission to take on the burden of positive,
4 everlasting change from school children and heavily
5 reconsider their current complicit stance on the role
6 of guns in school safety. Do what's right for the
7 people of our country. Thank you.

8 DR. ZAIS: Thank you.

9 (Applause.)

10 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Pamela
11 Champion, from Be a Champion Foundation.

12 MS. CHAMPION: Good morning. My name is Pam
13 Champion and I represent the Be a Champion Foundation.
14 I want to express my appreciation to be able to have
15 the opportunity to come to speak before the federal
16 commission board today to address the safety within our
17 schools.

18 As a mother of a child who was brutally killed
19 under the watchful eye of one of our educational
20 universities within 2011, I am all, all too aware about
21 the safety and the impact of violence within our
22 schools.

1 In the wake of the violent killing of my son,
2 we created the Robert D. Champion Drum Major for Change
3 Foundation, a foundation that focused on eradicating
4 the violence within our educational institutions.

5 Later in 2015, we initiated the Be a Champion
6 Foundation which extended our effort in providing
7 proactive solutions to prevent violence, using our six
8 pathway approach to championing peace and wellbeing.

9 In 2014, we had the opportunity to come to
10 Washington and meet with Arne Duncan and to provide
11 proactive proposals to him to address just such the
12 kind of things we are addressing today. We gained his
13 insight. We gained his approval. And we were able to
14 make some small impact with seminars and virtual
15 sessions.

16 Now today, we are addressing again safety
17 within our schools and that is what we are here to do.
18 Students are inundated with violence and with few
19 messages to counteract it. Students go to school every
20 day. They are under tremendous emotional,
21 psychological and moral, mental assault every day in
22 school.

1 So we should expand and clarify that is deemed
2 as school safety. What does school safety look at in
3 various communities? What does school safety look like
4 to students with disabilities?

5 Note for all schools and communities, police
6 presence may not, does not equal safety. Teachers with
7 guns do not equate to safety. Regardless of whether
8 someone is a teacher with a gun or a police or a
9 security office with a gun, with the definition, it defines a
10 school as being unsafe.

11 Beyond physical safety, children need to feel
12 emotionally and socially safe. Safety efforts should
13 be put in response of mass -- safety efforts should not
14 be put in response to mass shooting or mass violence.

15 But it should be reinforced the idea that
16 school is a safe place. Safety efforts should be put
17 in response to mass shooting. But they should be
18 preventive, ongoing efforts placed in our schools.

19 School districts, institutions of higher
20 learning, local state government agencies, parents,
21 students and community, we should view school safety

1 not just as the absence of violence, but to enforce the
2 presence of safe place, promote creating safe, positive
3 solutions for our schools, promote positive and
4 wellbeing schools to help environments to build
5 emotional and social tolerance.

6 Consider sensitivity to the school's cultural
7 differences and the meaning of safety when implementing
8 preventive measures to provide safety. Consider
9 sensitivity to the safety means by students of various
10 disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education should
11 mandate antiviolenence education as part of the
12 curriculum.

13 DR. ZAIS: Ms. Champion, I'm going to have to
14 ask you to wrap up.

15 MS. CHAMPION: Okay. Thank you. Our higher
16 education must educate teachers, school guidance and
17 social workers how to handle and work with violence and
18 how to identify it, how to be able to know whether a
19 student is available. And of course, our government
20 should establish -- (off mic) -- again, thank you.

21 DR. ZAIS: Thank you very much.

22 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Myrna

1 Mandlawitz from the School Social Work Association of
2 America.

3 MS. MANDLAWITZ: Good morning. I am Myrna
4 Mandlawitz, with the School Social Work Association of
5 America, known as SWAA. SWAA represents school social
6 workers across the country and those professionals
7 provide direct mental health and support services to
8 students and consultative services to staff.

9 They connect students and families with school
10 and community resources and they are individuals who
11 come to work in schools with clinical licensure with a
12 minimal of master's degree in mental health services.

13 I would start by saying that the -- that
14 school social workers believe that the spate of gun
15 violence in schools is a public health issue, both
16 tragic and preventable.

17 That said, SWAA supports school softening, not
18 school hardening. We prefer to talk not in terms of
19 school violence, but rather focus on prevention and
20 developing a positive climate for learning for every
21 student.

22 What does that mean? It means fostering

1 mutual respect among students and adults. It means
2 having caring, highly trained adults, including school
3 social workers, school psychologists, school
4 counselors, school nurses and other specialized
5 instructional support personnel in every school. It
6 means having a strong team in place to develop a
7 positive school environment.

8 We have several recommendations, and we've
9 also submitted these in writing through the
10 safety@ed.gov. First, we would encourage expanded
11 access to mental health services in schools.

12 We believe very strongly that funding for both
13 the Department of Education and SAMHSA programs must be
14 maintained and increased to ensure school- and
15 community-based services are available for all children
16 who require these services.

17 We support a focus on prevention, early
18 identification and early intervention and school-wide
19 initiatives such as positive behavioral interventions
20 and supports. We want to address bullying, violence,
21 anger management and other social and emotional issues
22 that impede learning early before the larger problems

1 develop.

2 We also believe in developing good crisis
3 plans in schools. That means detailed communications
4 strategies, drills and training for students and
5 ensuring that all students are able to be safe if
6 there's an incident.

7 And we're very concerned particularly about
8 students with disabilities and what happens to students
9 like that when an incident occurs in a school. And
10 then also finally in that, in developing good crisis
11 plans, a plan for recovery for students and staff
12 should a traumatic event occur.

13 The School Social Work Association opposes
14 more police and security guards because we believe
15 research has not proven this makes schools safer. And
16 in some instances, students of color and students with
17 disabilities have been disproportionately subjected to
18 harsh discipline.

19 That said, the School Social Work Association
20 recognizes that well-trained school resource officers
21 can and do play a vital role as part of a comprehensive
22 school safety plan.

1 Finally, we would oppose any attempts to arm
2 school staff. School social workers and other school
3 personnel do not want to be feared as armed guards.
4 They want to focus on instructional roles and
5 supporting sustainable school safety. And again, we
6 have submitted more recommendations through the
7 website.

8 We thank you for your attention to these
9 recommendations and we are very happy to engage in a
10 dialogue and provide additional information and
11 services and resources. Thank you very much.

12 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Mandlawitz.

13 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Amelia
14 Vance, Future of Privacy Forum.

15 MS. VANCE: On behalf of the Future of Privacy
16 Forum, thank you to the Federal Commission on Student
17 Safety for allowing me to speak today. My name is
18 Amelia Vance, and I am FPS's director of education
19 privacy.

20 Among other initiatives, I run a monthly
21 student privacy working group for district and state
22 privacy staffers representing 45 states. In my

1 previous role at the National Association of State
2 Boards of Education, I co-authored a report on school
3 surveillance, privacy and equity, proposing a framework
4 for schools seeking to ensure student safety while also
5 protecting their privacy. I am here today to ask that
6 any commission recommendations include appropriate
7 privacy guardrails around school safety measures to
8 ensure that student privacy and equity are protected.

9 Parents trust schools with their children and
10 we want schools to act to ensure student safety. In
11 order for that to happen, schools must engage in some
12 forms of surveillance.

13 This includes everything from ensuring
14 preschoolers do not wander off to keeping third graders
15 on task, as well as preventing or identifying instances
16 of bullying or potential violence.

17 These responsibilities are not new. But as
18 technology has evolved, schools have an increased
19 ability to monitor students continually, both in and
20 out of the classroom. Schools are using services such
21 as social media monitoring, digital video surveillance
22 linked to law enforcement and visitor management

1 systems to help protect their students.

2 These can be effective tools. However, they
3 can also harm students if there are not appropriate
4 measures in place to regulate and guide their use.

5 Many recent state school safety proposals
6 include surveillance as a tactic to reduce or prevent
7 future school violence. For example, Florida's new law
8 creates a database combining data from social media,
9 law enforcement and social services agencies.

10 The school safety plan from Texas proposes
11 combining local, state and federal resources to scan
12 and analyze not only public student social media posts
13 but also private or direct messages and information
14 exchanged in private chat groups or via text message.

15 To be clear, we are talking about the
16 government actively seeking out children's social media
17 accounts, both public and private, and combining this
18 information with existing law enforcement or social
19 services records to profile which students are threats.

20 Individual districts and states can and should
21 set their own policies of whether and how to monitor
22 students and protect school safety. However, privacy

1 guardrails must be drawn so parents and students can be
2 reassured that their rights will be protected.

3 The negative effects of surveillance should be
4 considered as well. Research shows that surveillance
5 can undermine a student's sense of safety, creating a
6 prison-like environment where students feel big brother
7 is always watching.

8 Students are still maturing and need to know
9 schools are safe spaces where they can ask questions,
10 think creatively and make mistakes. Increased
11 surveillance can also create a permanent record that
12 can limit a student's future opportunities.

13 These effects can be mitigated by adopting
14 privacy protections such as those laid out in the fair
15 information practice principles or my report.

16 Any surveillance that is undertaken should
17 have policies about what data is collected, why it is
18 collected and how the data will be used. However,
19 privacy should never get in the way of preventing
20 school violence.

21 In the wake of the Virginia Tech shooting, the
22 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, FERPA, was

1 amended to clarify when information can be shared
2 during a health or safety emergency. However, that is
3 not enough.

4 Districts have shared that they need more
5 guidance on when they are able to report potential
6 safety threats and not enough teachers are aware of
7 what FERPA allows.

8 The Department of Education's privacy
9 technical assistance center has been vital for schools
10 seeking practical guidance on FERPA. The commission
11 should recommend that PTAC public guidance and provide
12 more technical assistance on this issue.

13 Schools across America are looking to this
14 commission's recommendations to guide their decisions
15 around safety and surveillance. The commission should
16 recommend that programs or proposals to collect and
17 analyze additional student data should be targeted at
18 the most serious threats to school safety.

19 If applied broadly to less serious violations
20 of school rules, the programs could overwhelm school
21 administrators with data, cast suspicion on students
22 who show no signs of violence behavior and fail to

1 promptly identify individuals who pose genuine threats
2 to school safety.

3 The commission should also urge schools to be
4 transparent about their data-driven safety initiatives.
5 Trust is a crucial pillar of school communities.
6 Student opportunities should not be limited either by
7 school safety concerns or by violations of their
8 privacy. Thank you.

9 DR. ZAIS: Thank you very much, Ms. Vance.

10 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Chelsea
11 Crittle, from Tufts University.

12 MS. CRITTLE: Good morning. My name is
13 Chelsea Crittle and I'm a fourth-year doctoral
14 candidate in the social psychology area at Tufts
15 University. My research focuses on how race and gender
16 impacts behavioral and cognitive outcomes, including
17 racial bias and discrimination.

18 As a social scientist, I'm excited about the
19 opportunity to relay empirical research that might
20 infer the commission's next steps. But I'm also
21 concerned by the quest for quick solutions to
22 addressing such a wide-scale societal problem.

1 Specifically, I'd like to focus on the
2 recommendation that would implement armed guards in
3 schools. The scientific community currently knows very
4 little about the effectiveness of armed school guards
5 in reducing school shootings.

6 Anecdotally, we can look to the Parkland
7 school shooting which suggests that the presence of
8 armed personnel does not automatically ensure the
9 deterrence of school shootings or the protection
10 against active shooters.

11 Despite a lack of understanding regarding the
12 efficacy of armed personnel in decreasing school
13 violence, schools have been adopting more security
14 measures over time.

15 When attempting to understand the impacts of
16 law enforcement in schools, we must consider the
17 extreme racial disparities in school discipline that
18 adversely impacts black and Latinx students compared to
19 their white counterparts.

20 Social psychological research has shown that,
21 within the context of schools, race influences how
22 teachers interpret specific behaviors and it increases

1 the teacher's likeliness to detect patterns or
2 misbehavior across time. We see that minority students
3 are more often subjected to exclusionary discipline,
4 which includes suspensions and expulsions, and that the
5 disparities in discipline do not closely relate to
6 actually behavioral differences amongst students.

7 For black and Latinx students, disparities in
8 discipline may lead to a mistrust of teachers and other
9 school authority figures, feelings of doubt and whether
10 or not they belong in the school environment and lower
11 academic, behavioral and social outcomes.

12 Within the context of police interactions,
13 social psychological research has shown that race
14 influences misperceptions of weapons in split-second
15 decision-making by police officers, in addition to a
16 increase in officers' response speed and decisions to
17 shoot.

18 Not surprisingly, black Americans and Latinx
19 Americans are more likely than white Americans to view
20 the police negatively and more likely to anticipate
21 being judged and treated unfair by police.

22 Merging what we know about school discipline

1 and police interactions, we can reason that placing
2 armed individuals in schools could disproportionately
3 and adversely impact black and Latinx children. If the
4 goal is to foster a safer environment for all students,
5 the commission should consider the impact of race when
6 deciding on a solution.

7 Policies that rely on law enforcement to
8 address school discipline has been shown to lead to an
9 increase in referrals to the juvenile justice system.
10 Thus we are running the risk of having schools resemble
11 criminal justice institutions rather than the safe and
12 healthy school environment that we are all striving
13 towards.

14 It is important to note that school shootings
15 may be a byproduct of a larger scale societal issue
16 involving but not limited to access to guns and toxic
17 masculinity. Government officials, lawmakers and
18 scientists need to address the root causes of these
19 events rather than only focusing on one of the
20 symptoms.

21 Though tragic and heart-wrenching for all,
22 school shootings are rare and school violence overall

1 has shown a decline over the past several decades,
2 according to data from the U.S. Department of
3 Education. What has increased however is the
4 prevalence of the school-to-prison pipeline and the
5 criminalization of our schools which negatively impacts
6 the life outcomes of black and Latinx students.

7 It is imperative that we consider the safety
8 of all school children, especially those that have been
9 disproportionately harmed by police-involved
10 interactions and by exclusionary discipline practices.

11 When attempting to make a change, it is
12 important that we are confident that these programs and
13 policies will work as a result of rigorous scientific
14 training.

15 Moving forward, I ask the Federal Commission
16 on School Safety to invest in a solid, proactive, data-
17 driven initiative for fostering safer school
18 environments for all students. Thank you.

19 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Crittle.

20 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Audrae
21 Erickson, who is a local parent.

22 MS. ERICKSON: Thank you to the commission.

1 My name is Audrae Erickson, and I am testifying in my
2 capacity as a concerned parent.

3 One week ago, a school-aged reported for Time
4 Magazine's Time for Kids asked White House Press
5 Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders about mass shootings
6 in schools and what was being done. He noted that many
7 children, quote, "worry about the fact that we or our
8 friends could get shot at school," unquote.

9 Sanders was understandably choked (sic) up and
10 so are the parents of school-aged students like me when
11 our kids walk out the door each morning while we try to
12 wipe away the fears about safety from our minds.

13 As a mother of three students in public
14 schools, I believe there are important steps that can
15 be taken to better protect our nation's students.
16 First, ensure full-time, five day a week coverage by
17 school resource officers, or SROs, to protect the
18 safety of our students in every elementary, middle and
19 high school and even colleges across the country.

20 Fortunately, SRO officers are present in many
21 schools, but not all. And some schools that have an
22 SRO do not have full-time SRO coverage. This is

1 because many SRO officers are allowed to work a
2 condensed four-day work week, leaving our students
3 vulnerable if a tragic event should unfold on their day
4 off.

5 This situation can and should be fixed.
6 Either condensed work weeks should not be allowed for
7 SRO officers or additional SRO coverage should be added
8 for the fifth or uncovered day of the week. In short,
9 every school should have an SRO on premise whenever
10 schools are in session.

11 In addition to full-time SRO coverage in every
12 school, we must also prevent guns and knives from
13 entering school buildings in the first place. How that
14 is accomplished should be part of a multifaceted plan
15 that, among other important elements, could include the
16 following options.

17 Number one, require school faculty members to
18 be routinely present and strategically stationed in all
19 hallways and entrances before school and during peak
20 times of students coming into, going out of or moving
21 around in the school building. Parent volunteers who
22 complete training and screening in advance can provide

1 an additional presence of authority as needed to act as
2 extra sets of eyes and ears as well as a deterrent
3 during these peak periods.

4 Number two, active social media monitoring of
5 students with the help of leading social media
6 platforms and message app companies could be an early
7 detection mechanism of a troubled student or teen.

8 Tip lines, number three, in the form of
9 school-based apps, not community-based apps, for
10 students to report concerns or issues at any time to
11 alert school officials, even anonymously if desired,
12 with full-time coverage of that app by designated
13 school officials seven days and evenings a week.

14 Number four, unannounced, random and periodic
15 backpack checks and/or metal detector screening, even
16 with handheld scanning wands, at school entrances to
17 serve as a deterrent.

18 Number five, involvement of all stakeholders
19 in a school community in that school's safety plan.
20 In-person meetings, importantly coupled with conference
21 calls and Internet-based access or capabilities to
22 join, could increase involvement and should be held at

1 least twice a year by the principal or administrator
2 with parents, students, SROs, teachers and other
3 stakeholders to ensure that everyone is aware of the
4 safety plan that has been implemented for their school
5 and to seek their input on how that plan can be
6 improved.

7 Number six, finally and very importantly,
8 commit significantly more resources and funding to
9 increase school safety and to ensure that principals
10 and SRO officers have the tools they need to keep our
11 students safe.

12 As a parent, I am deeply grateful for the
13 commitment of our nation's principals, school boards,
14 the administration and this federal commission to
15 improve the safety of our students and for the
16 opportunity to speak today. Thank you.

17 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Erickson.

18 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Gillian
19 Huebner, Montgomery County Council of PTAs.

20 MS. HUEBNER: Good morning. Thank you for
21 convening and for listening to the conversation. My
22 name is Gillian Huebner. I'm a resident of Montgomery

1 County, Maryland where I serve as the chair of a
2 subcommittee on school climate and safety with the
3 Montgomery County Council of PTAs. Our organization
4 represents the families of more than 160,000 students
5 in 205 schools. We are the largest school district in
6 Maryland.

7 I am also professionally an international
8 child protection expert and I've worked for more than
9 20 years on issues related to child development and
10 protection, including as an advisor on these issues
11 with the U.S. government.

12 I'm familiar with war zones. I've worked and
13 lived in a number of them. And I left my life as a
14 frontline humanitarian worker to raise my children in a
15 safer environment.

16 Now, my children, all of our children, are at
17 greater risk here in the United States than they would
18 be had I stayed in Angola, where I witnessed the end of
19 a war and ineffective demobilization process whereby
20 combatants handed over their weapons in favor of a
21 nonviolent future.

22 The evidence shows that violence against

1 children is preventable. It is a choice and it has to
2 be a priority. And our country has unfortunately shown
3 time and time again that it is unwilling to make that
4 choice.

5 American children are starkly aware that they
6 are not a priority. And this has devastating effects
7 on their sense of security and safety, their ability to
8 learn and their mental health and wellbeing. We are
9 failing them.

10 The MCC PTA stands behind our student leaders
11 who are demanding that we do more and better to protect
12 our kids. They have our fullest support and we applaud
13 their strategic, principled leadership and look forward
14 to the power and the purpose of their votes. Their
15 time is now and the time for inaction is up.

16 The MCC PTA has joined hundreds of national
17 organizations in support of the call to action to
18 prevent violence, gun violence in the United States of
19 America. Although security measures are important, a
20 focus on simply preparing for school shootings is
21 insufficient. We need a change in mindset and policy
22 from reaction to prevention.

1 Prevention entails more than security measures
2 and begins long before a gunman might come to school.
3 We need a comprehensive approach to gun violence that
4 is informed by science and free from partisan politics.

5 On the first level, we need a national
6 requirement for all schools to assess school climate
7 and maintain physically and emotionally safe conditions
8 in positive school environments that protect all
9 students and adults from bullying, discrimination,
10 harassment and assault.

11 We need a ban on assault-style weapons, high
12 capacity ammunition clips and products that modify
13 semiautomatic firearms to enable them to function like
14 automatic firearms.

15 On the second level, we need adequate
16 staffing, counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists and
17 social workers of coordinated school- and community-
18 based mental health services for individuals with risk
19 factors for violence, recognizing that violence is not
20 intrinsically a product of mental illness.

21 We need reform of school discipline to reduce
22 exclusionary practices and foster positive social

1 behavior, emotional and academic success for students.
2 We need universal background checks to screen out
3 violent offenders, persons who have been hospitalized
4 for violence towards self and others and persons on no-
5 fly terrorist watch lists.

6 On the third level, we need a national program
7 to train and maintain school- and community-based
8 threat assessment teams that include mental health and
9 law enforcement partners.

10 Threat assessment programs should include
11 practical channels of communication for persons to
12 report potential threats, as well as interventions to
13 resolve conflicts in troubled individuals. We contend
14 that well-executed laws can reduce gun violence while
15 protecting all constitutional rights.

16 It's time for federal and state authorities to
17 take immediate action. Thank you for listening. Now,
18 you must act.

19 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Huebner.

20 (Applause.)

21 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Amanda
22 Lowe, from the National Disability Rights Network.

1 MS. LOWE: Good morning. My name is Amanda
2 Lowe, senior public policy analyst at the National
3 Disability Rights Network, or NDRN. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to share NDRN's views on how schools and
5 other involved stakeholders can improve school safety.

6 The importance of safety in schools for
7 America's 50.8 million K-12 students, as well as that
8 of students attending institutions of higher education,
9 cannot be overstated.

10 My remarks this morning will touch on issues
11 surrounding school safety in three main arenas: the
12 importance of maintaining the 2014 discipline guidance,
13 the implementation of what we know works to improve
14 school climate and safety and, finally, ensuring that
15 any potential hardening of schools adequately considers
16 students protected under the Individuals with
17 Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, and Section 504.

18 NDRN is a nonprofit membership organization
19 for the federally mandated protection and advocacy, or
20 P&A, agencies for individuals with disabilities. The
21 P&As were established by Congress to protect the rights
22 of people with disabilities and their families. The

1 P&As are in all 50 states, the District of Columbia,
2 Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories. Additionally,
3 there's a P&A affiliated with the Native American
4 Consortium in the Four Corners region of the Southwest.

5 Collectively, the 57 P&As are the largest
6 provider of legally based advocacy services to people
7 with disabilities in the United States. The P&As
8 provide critical legal advocacy to students protected
9 under both the IDEA and Section 504.

10 Indeed, in 2016, the P&As worked on nearly
11 14,000 individual cases and hundreds of systemic cases
12 related to enforcing the educational rights of students
13 with disabilities. One critically important area of
14 legally based advocacy is protecting the rights of
15 students with disabilities who belong to more than one
16 protected class.

17 In 2014, the U.S. Departments of Education and
18 Justice issued non-regulatory guidance package
19 providing information and support to schools and
20 districts for both -- for help both in complying with
21 our nation's civil rights laws and creating safer and
22 more welcoming schools for all students.

1 This guidance does not create new legal
2 requirements for schools nor does it take away any
3 tools that schools use to ensure safety. It does not
4 instruct school districts to ignore safety issues,
5 prevent or delay referral to law enforcement or prevent
6 removal from school for students who are truly
7 dangerous.

8 Contrary to statements by opponents, civil
9 rights and due process protections promote and increase
10 a positive school climate and safety. The stakes are
11 high if this guidance that protects children from
12 unnecessary school removal is rescinded. This critical
13 guidance and related documents must remain in place and
14 NDRN strongly recommends the commission this guidance

15 In 2009, NDRN published "School's Not Supposed
16 to Hurt", which documented the widespread abuse and
17 death of students in our schools through the
18 inappropriate use of restraints, seclusion and
19 aversives.

20 In that report, NDRN publicly advocated for
21 the widespread implementation of positive behavior
22 intervention and supports, or PBIS, as a way to

1 effectively address behavior issues. Indeed, NDRN has
2 been steadfast in our support of PBIS. School-wide
3 PBIS is a data-driven, school-wide system of support
4 that includes proactive strategies for defining,
5 teaching and supporting appropriate student behaviors
6 to create positive environments.

7 It is not an understatement to say that PBIS,
8 whose efficacy is well-documented in the research, has
9 represented a fundamental paradigm shift in how schools
10 and adults in schools approach behavior. It is also
11 important to note that PBIS is specifically mentioned
12 in both IDEA and the umbrella term, multi-tiered
13 systems of support, is mentioned in ESSA.

14 Two additional whole-school approaches to
15 address behavior are restorative justice and trauma-
16 informed practices. The efficacy of these approaches
17 towards improving school climate and safety is well-
18 documented in the research. Additionally, these
19 approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be part
20 of a broader school-wide PBIS model.

21 Similarly, we know that access to quality
22 school- and community-based mental health services

1 provided early and in appropriate quantities minimize,
2 and in some cases prevent altogether adolescent and
3 adult mental health needs.

4 Finally, NDRN recommends that if hardening
5 approaches are considered by the commission, whether
6 through school resource officers or actual hardware
7 installed in schools, that these not reduce the
8 accessibility to the actual physical premises or free
9 appropriate public education in the least restrictive
10 environment for all students protected under IDEA and
11 Section 504.

12 For example, all SROs must be trained in how
13 to appropriately interact with all students covered
14 under these laws. Additionally, any door locks or
15 safety devices must be accessible for all students.
16 Finally, any school lockdown or evacuation drills must
17 take into consideration the needs of students covered
18 under the IDEA and Section 504.

19 NDRN appreciates the opportunity to provide
20 public comments to the Federal Commission on School
21 Safety and we'd be more than happy to answer any
22 questions or provide additional information. And we'll

1 be providing additional written comments to the portal.

2 Thank you.

3 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Lowe.

4 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Amina
5 Henderson-Redwan, from Voices of Youth in Chicago
6 Education.

7 MS. HENDERSON-REDWAN: Hello. Again, my name
8 is Amina Henderson-Redwan. I work with Communities
9 United in Chicago and Voices of Youth in Chicago
10 Education and Good Kids My City. I joined these youth-
11 led movements because my peers and I experience the
12 school-to-prison pipeline and violence in our community
13 firsthand.

14 I'm a 20-year-old African-American Palestinian
15 woman, born and raised on the South Side of Chicago.
16 At the age of nine, I watched my father die. I have
17 lost loved ones due to gun violence in my city. I have
18 been arrested in school when I had an anxiety attack.
19 I tried to walk away from a peace circle and a security
20 guard pushed my head into a chalkboard.

21 My most recent loss to gun violence was my
22 best friend. February 18th of this year, he was shot

1 and killed on his way home. Anxiety and bipolar
2 depression is something I battle with on a daily basis.
3 But this does not define me. Another statistic in a
4 failed system, you would think. But I never lost hope.

5 Thanks to the work that I joined my sophomore
6 year of high school, Voice is a statewide coalition led
7 by youth across Illinois that works to end the school-
8 to-prison pipeline.

9 We've passed pieces of legislation in Illinois
10 that collects data on exclusionary discipline and even
11 another law, SB 100, which eliminates zero tolerance
12 inside of school.

13 Last week was our most recent victory. We
14 passed a bill that is currently sitting on our
15 governor's table that creates a competitive grant which
16 all school districts in Illinois can apply for to
17 create and expand their mental and behavioral health
18 services, like drug and alcohol treatment training for
19 staff, training for staff for conflict resolution and
20 restorative practices and other trauma-informed
21 approaches to meeting students' developmental needs.

22 In my five years of advocating for

1 legislation, I have watched our bill die on the floor
2 because of one vote. I have seen my peers cry. I even
3 cried, of course. I've waken up at 5 o'clock in the
4 morning to take a 7 a.m. train with only three hours of
5 sleep to educate my Illinois legislators on what it
6 means to be safe inside of our schools.

7 Organizations like Voice and Communities
8 United are in the forefront of creating legislation for
9 safer schools. Illinois is modeling what it means to
10 listen to groups on the ground on what it means to be
11 safe, especially for students of color like myself.

12 I appreciate the president of the United
13 States creating this Federal Commission on School
14 Safety after the tragedy in Parkland. However,
15 whenever these tragedies happen, like Columbine, like
16 Sandy Hook, our country's response has typically been
17 the hardening of schools.

18 But for students like us, this is not what
19 safety means. Safety does not mean more police in
20 schools, more metal detectors and armed teachers.
21 Safety means to get to the root causes of a student's
22 misbehavior. It means more conflict resolution,

1 alternatives to arrest and supporting students when
2 their mental and behavioral health is needed.

3 This Federal Commission on School Safety needs
4 to listen to communities that it's supposed to
5 represent, communities like mine. And this is what's
6 needed. Please take into consideration of what I just
7 stated. I appreciate your time. Thank you.

8 (Applause.)

9 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Henderson-Redwan.

10 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Marlyn
11 Tillman, from Gwinnett SToPP.

12 MS. TILLMAN: Good morning. My name is Marlyn
13 Tillman. I'm with the Gwinnett Parent Coalition to
14 Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline, or Gwinnett
15 SToPP for short. And we fight against just what the
16 name says.

17 Thank you for the opportunity to address the
18 commission on this very important topic of school
19 safety. I would be remiss if I did not address the
20 lack of transparency and intentionality in setting up
21 the listening sessions.

22 The timing of the notice was not conducive for

1 parents and youth to be included on a topic that
2 impacts them directly. The three proposed upcoming
3 session dates and places have yet to be announced. I
4 implore the commission to give proper notice so the
5 community can fully participate and you can hear from a
6 set of diverse voices. Lean into the discomfort. We
7 will all benefit from it.

8 Let me give you background on the state of
9 Georgia, where I hail from. We have a state law that
10 permits local boards to arm teachers, while holding the
11 systems harmless for the consequences of their actions.
12 Perhaps you've heard about the Georgia teacher who
13 brought a gun to school and barricaded himself in the
14 classroom.

15 We have laws that state school police should
16 have training, but fail to set up standards for
17 training. My own Gwinnett County Public Schools had a
18 contact quota for their school resource officers.

19 During the diversity awareness training that
20 my organization facilitated for the school resource
21 officers, an officer assigned to one of our most
22 diverse schools lamented that he doesn't like that

1 people who come into this country aren't assimilating
2 and won't conform. How do you think that impacts the
3 officer's interactions at that school?

4 Let's talk about school safety. While
5 shootings at schools are primarily committed by white
6 students in white schools, schools with a large black
7 and brown population get the brunt of school police and
8 buildings that resemble and function like prisons.
9 There is no evidence that police make schools safer.

10 School safety cannot be the hardening of
11 schools, adding police or setting up the school for a
12 gun battle at the O.K. Corral by arming teachers. Any
13 definition must include emotional safety. Children
14 must be emotionally safe to learn at school in order to
15 thrive.

16 According to the civil rights data that Ed
17 collects and the GAO, who analyzed that data, students
18 with disabilities, black and brown students are
19 disproportionately impacted by overly punitive
20 discipline. Right now, students with disabilities and
21 black and brown students are not emotionally safe to
22 learn while at school.

1 So what is real safety? It must be proactive
2 and a holistic approach. Create a climate and culture
3 of care and nurturing, a place where students are
4 emotionally and physically safe to learn.

5 We have to invest in evidence-based violence
6 reduction strategies that engage all the community
7 stakeholders and have been proven effective, such as
8 utilizing peacekeepers instead of police, restorative
9 practices and transformative justice.

10 We must provide resources like counselors,
11 improve school facilities, accessible after-school
12 programs that help better connect students to school.
13 When students are connected, their parents connect.
14 School police have moved from protecting the children
15 to policing the children.

16 Police should be called when needed, not
17 patrolling the halls. Policing has been shown to
18 disproportionately criminalize youth of color and
19 students with disabilities. School-based arrests and
20 referrals to law enforcement increase when police have
21 a regular presence in schools.

22 Cultural competencies, including understanding

1 and addressing racism, sexism, homophobia and all the
2 other -isms and other implicit and explicit biases.

3 Mental health access that's not necessarily
4 managed by the school, but a process that provides
5 seamless connection for those who need it. Change gun
6 laws. We do not need military-grade weapons in
7 everyday citizens' hands.

8 In closing, please hold these listening
9 sessions in areas where the impacted communities
10 reside. They could be held where OCR maintains a
11 regional office. Also, do not leave out our native and
12 rural communities. Their voice at the table is long
13 overdue. Thank you.

14 (Applause.)

15 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Deborah
16 Ziegler, Council for Exceptional Children.

17 MS. ZIEGLER: Good morning, panel members
18 representing the Federal Commission on School Safety.
19 My name is Deborah Ziegler and I am the director of
20 policy and advocacy at the Council for Exceptional
21 Children.

22 The Council for Exceptional Children is the

1 professional association of educators dedicated to
2 advancing the educational success of children and youth
3 with exceptionalities that accomplish its mission
4 through advocacy, standards and professional
5 development. Thank you for the opportunity to provide
6 comment to the Federal Commission on School Safety this
7 morning.

8 The Council for Exceptional Children strongly
9 opposes arming teachers and other school personnel in
10 schools. Arming teachers has no empirical support and
11 is an ill-conceived and counterproductive idea that has
12 potential for making schools less safe.

13 CEC believes the possession of a firearm in
14 school should be limited to carefully selected,
15 specially trained school resource officers. All
16 children and youth are entitled to a safe and positive
17 school climate and environment conducive to learning
18 without fear.

19 Likewise, teachers and school personnel have
20 the right to safe working environments, free from
21 violence. Arming teachers is not the answer to ensure
22 the safety of our nation's schools, children, youth and

1 educators.

2 This nation must come together to enact
3 comprehensive policies and practices that support
4 school and community safety and protection and
5 commonsense gun violence prevention methods.

6 CEC supports an approach to school and
7 community safety that addresses both preventative and
8 response and is rooted in research and evidence,
9 addresses mental health services for children and youth
10 and confronts the stigma of mental health challenges
11 and ensures an adequate number of personnel who are
12 trained to address the complex needs of children and
13 youth with mental health challenges.

14 School safety policies must use an
15 interdisciplinary approach that reinforces a
16 partnership between education, juvenile justice, mental
17 health, social welfare, law enforcement and community
18 engagement systems.

19 Require implementation of evidence-based
20 practices that address prevention and response while
21 ameliorating the stigma associated with mental health
22 challenges.

1 Focus on the impact of mental health
2 challenges on children and youth social, educational
3 and employment outcomes. Confront and remedy the
4 national shortages of special educators and specialized
5 instructional support personnel who are trained to
6 address the complex needs of children and youth with
7 mental health challenges.

8 CEC stands ready to continue to advocate for
9 policies and meaningful actions not only to address
10 violence in our nation's schools and communities, but
11 to create evidence-based solutions that are rooted in
12 safety, prevention and interdisciplinary approach. The
13 nation's children and youth deserve nothing less.
14 Thank you very much.

15 (Applause.)

16 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Ziegler.

17 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Maria Elena
18 Moreno Van Maren, a parent at a public school.

19 MS. MORENO VAN MAREN: Good morning. My name
20 is Maria Elena, and it's a pleasure to be here to give
21 some suggestions to you guys today.

22 In my heart, many, many years on one idea to

1 create a program to support practice positive
2 discipline at schools with the students. And when
3 we're thinking about it, when we sit down, we say why,
4 how do you support security in the schools, right?

5 I believe those people who are attacking the
6 schools is because they are not feeling warm, love or
7 attention.

8 So when we're talking about that and we're
9 looking at the system, how the system disciplines the
10 kids in the schools, there we are talking about because those
11 people was children and now they have views how other people
12 have views.

13 I look in the system how they discipline kids
14 at school and I'm going to talk about my experience.
15 And it's very hard for me to see if a children how it
16 increases, emotional increase, they just send them to a very
17 big person.

18 If you're screaming, I am screaming
19 more than you.

20 Only the depressed, the kids, that system only puts
21 - held the children - take kids that are on emotions.

22 And that how they can support the social and
23 emotional area.

1 For me, positive discipline is teaching in
2 appropriate behavior the children in the way that is
3 respectful but also is essential in relationship with
4 the children. And that is not what I see in the school
5 system.

6 The discipline system in most of the schools
7 that I see is not education. It's very hard on
8 children. It's only teaching the children violence and
9 suppresses their emotions. We need to create a program
10 that supports teachers and children in the area, in the
11 social and emotional area.

12 And being here most, we need to focus in the
13 social and emotional on children because over there
14 they are diseased from the future. We right now
15 whatever is going to happen in the future, we create it
16 because we make those environments every day for the
17 children at school.

18 But also, the problem is not the children.
19 The problem is the adults, the teachers who are there
20 all day with the kids. So I always imagine in my heart
21 a wonderful, beautiful classroom where materials to
22 help the children relax. We see collages and also

1 therapies to help the children relax and come in, in a
2 relaxed environment and they can express those
3 feelings. They can feel comfortable. They can feel
4 peace when they are in classes at the school.

5 So my idea to create a support -- a program to
6 support the school is because we need focus in the
7 social and emotion area.

8 The other -- a part that we like to add in
9 this conversation is how we can be partners because
10 this is another problem. Administrations at schools
11 are very separated from the parents.
12 They no support parents together or they no listen most what
13 the parents because the parents have the phrase teaching for
14 the kids and they not listen.

15 So how we can include in this program
16 something that working how we can work as a partner to
17 support our cities for the future. Thank you so much
18 and I really appreciate this opportunity to support our
19 kids.

20 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Moreno Van Maren.

21 MS. MORENO VAN MAREN: Thank you.

22 (Applause.)

1 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Noelle Ng,
2 from AASA.

3 MS. NG: Hi. Good morning. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to be here. I am Noelle Ng, with AASA.
5 And I'm here today on behalf of and submit the
6 following statement from six national education
7 organizations representing school system leaders and
8 administrators committed to ensuring that all students
9 are safe and secure in their learning environment.

10 AASA, as well as the Association of
11 Educational Service Agencies, the Association of School
12 Business Officials International, the Association of
13 Latino Administrators and Superintendents, the National
14 Rural Education Association and the National Rural
15 Education Advocacy Consortium.

16 As the Federal School Safety Commission moves
17 forward in its work to achieve its stated goal of
18 quickly providing meaningful and actionable
19 recommendations and best practices to keep students
20 safe at school, it is absolutely critical that the
21 commission ensures both the process and outcome are
22 very meaningful to all Americans, particularly school

1 system leaders charged with ensuring students feel safe
2 and supported and that school buildings are the safest
3 place for students to be.

4 This week, we shared the list of the
5 commission's potential areas of study and
6 recommendations with school leaders across the country
7 and asked them to rank the items on the list in terms
8 of what would be most relevant to their shared goal of
9 keeping students safe at school.

10 The top three areas that superintendents and
11 education leaders want the commission to address are
12 opportunities to improve access to mental health
13 treatment, best practices for school-based threat
14 assessment and violence prevention strategies and best
15 practices for school buildings and campus security from
16 federal government components.

17 Of note as to how you prioritize your work and
18 in light of recent conversations and media coverage,
19 the items school leaders are the least interested in
20 having the commission address is the repeal of the
21 Obama administration's rethink school design policies.

22 In terms of improving access to mental health,

1 we recommend the following, some of which is drawn from
2 the "Futures without Violence: Safe, Healthy and Ready
3 to Learn" report from May of 2015.

4 The U.S. Departments of Health and Human
5 Services and Education should provide detailed guidance
6 on how community-based mental health providers and
7 other social service providers can receive information
8 from schools and vice versa about students' physical
9 and mental health needs while remaining in compliance
10 with federal privacy laws.

11 Flexibility should expand in all reimbursement
12 mechanisms for behavioral and mental health that
13 recognize the principle of the right treatment for the
14 right person at the right time. CMS should use
15 innovation funding to encourage states to implement
16 best practices and reimbursement strategies to support
17 the mental health needs of children.

18 The commission should support programs that
19 address shortages of trained and licensed providers who
20 can best meet the mental health needs of children,
21 including child and adolescent psychologists,
22 psychiatrists and developmental and behavioral

1 pediatric specialists.

2 The department should issue grants to states
3 to help develop programs to educate teachers, school
4 personnel and specialized instructional support
5 personnel in mental health conditions in children.

6 In terms of developing and sharing practices
7 for school-based threat assessment and violence
8 prevention strategies, we recommend the commission to
9 create specific school violence prevention goals and
10 develop metrics for meeting these goals.

11 The administration should create two distinct
12 websites that serve as a portal for states and local
13 school districts.

14 The first should focus on learning about and
15 applying for grants focused on school safety and the
16 second should focus on best practices for school-based
17 threat assessment and violence prevention strategies as
18 well as best practices for school buildings and campus
19 security.

20 The administration should have a technical
21 assistance center dedicated on a first come, first
22 serve basis to review a district's school-based threat

1 assessment systems.

2 The development and operation of anonymous
3 reporting systems for threats of school violence.
4 Placement and use of metal detectors, locks, lighting
5 and other deterrent training and security training of
6 personnel and students.

7 A comprehensive approach is necessary to
8 prevent future school violence. Schools remain the
9 safest place for children and today's schools are
10 considerably safer than they were 20 years ago. Over
11 the last decade, the number of schools reporting an
12 incident of violent crime fell by more than 20 percent.

13 Despite successful efforts by school districts
14 to reduce gun violence, 3,000 children and teens are
15 killed by guns and 15,000 are injured outside of
16 schools each year, which is far more than children in
17 any other major industrialized country.

18 Thus, a solution to prevent the killing of
19 innocent youth cannot be the sole responsibility of the
20 school community. We want to reiterate our belief that
21 we cannot make our schools armed fortresses. We oppose
22 efforts to bring more guns into our schools by arming

1 teachers and administrators.

2 Until we eliminate the easy access to weapons
3 and address the limited access to mental health care,
4 the conditions that allow the continued horrific murder
5 of educators and children in schools will happen again
6 and again.

7 If we hope to prevent future tragedies at
8 schools, we must comprehensively address school safety,
9 gun safety and mental health. We must be willing to
10 spend the time and resources necessary to make
11 sustainable changes.

12 The time to address school safety is now and
13 our nation's students, our nation's future, are
14 depending on it. Thank you very much.

15 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Ng.

16 MS. MILLER: It's now 11 o'clock. So we can
17 take our 15-minute break.

18 DR. ZAIS: All right. A 15-minute break.

19 (Whereupon, the foregoing went off the
20 record.)

21 DR. ZAIS: We are joined on the stage by a
22 representative of the Department of Justice, with

1 Jessica Hart. And we will start with our next speaker.

2 MS. MILLER: Our next speaker is Michael Yin.
3 He's from the Montgomery County Regional Student
4 Government Association.

5 MR. YIN: Members of the commission, fellow
6 speakers and everyone who's here to listen, good
7 morning. Thank you so much for being here. I'm
8 Michael Yin, one of two U.S. presidential scholars from
9 Maryland and this school year's president of the
10 Montgomery County Regional Student Government
11 Association.

12 I'm here on behalf of the 161,000 students of
13 my county, the biggest school system in Maryland and
14 one of the 15 largest in the nation. And I'm here
15 today to talk about the student perspective.

16 I graduated from Montgomery Blair High School
17 about 24 hours ago. Standing on that stage was a tear-
18 inducing experience and I'm truly lucky in so many
19 ways. But not everyone is so fortunate.

20 The eight students killed at Santa Fe High
21 School will never walk across that stage. The 16-year-
22 old girl from Great Mills High School in my home state

1 of Maryland will never walk across that stage. The
2 students of Huffman High School, Marshall County High
3 School, Wake Forest University and the 14 students who
4 were killed at Stoneman Douglas High School will never
5 walk across that stage. And even the ones who are
6 lucky enough to graduate from these schools will never
7 be the same.

8 The thing is, we students feel and we know
9 that something is very, very wrong in our schools. We
10 feel it every time our superintendent releases a public
11 statement at the recent unthinkable tragedy.

12 But it's not unthinkable. It's expected. We
13 feel it when incredibly brave survivors of school
14 shootings like David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez are
15 dismissed and attacked because us students don't know
16 what we're talking about.

17 We feel it when our little brothers and little
18 sisters are unwilling to go to school not because of
19 tests or homework but because they are afraid. And
20 that's why we've been speaking out, because our futures
21 are on the line. But we're ready to help incite change
22 and find the solution.

1 We've been on the news debating policy with as
2 much vigor and hard-earned wisdom as seasoned
3 reporters. Almost a million for us have been marching
4 for our lives in D.C. and half a million more have been
5 marching elsewhere across the country and even
6 internationally. We've been doing our best. Now, we
7 just need some help from you.

8 As we're looking for solutions, we ask that
9 you listen to our students and teachers and other
10 staff, the people who spend every day in these schools.
11 I know we all want to end these tragedies. We just
12 need to look in the right direction to figure out how.

13 We can't be dismissive. Politicians have come
14 up with some good ideas. But if we really want to end
15 these tragedies, we need to listen to the people
16 closest to the school system.

17 One idea that's a little worrying though is
18 arming school staff. There's a lot of concerns we
19 students have, as do our teachers. Like one teacher
20 stated on Twitter, I knocked myself out head-butting
21 the ceiling pretending to be a particle. I've set my
22 arm on fire when lit ethanol trickled down my sleeve.

1 Please don't give me a gun. And that's a sentiment
2 echoed by every teacher I know. As we seek to make our
3 schools safer, we cannot turn them into a prison and
4 force school staff to be the guards.

5 While there is a limited role for trained
6 professionals like school resource officers, a school
7 full of guns is a tragedy waiting to happen. So if
8 we're not going to arm our teachers, what can we do?

9 Well, instead of adding more guns into the
10 mix, maybe we should go the other direction. I
11 understand that Secretary DeVos has stated this school
12 safety commission will not be looking at the role of
13 firearms. And, to some degree, I understand that.
14 People are worried about their Second Amendment rights
15 and changing gun laws would be hard.

16 But still, though this may be a difficult
17 issue for us to talk about, it's a necessary one.
18 There's so much that we can change that doesn't even
19 begin to impinge upon the Second Amendment.

20 For starters, we can close the gun show
21 loophole that allows private parties to sell guns
22 without even asking for ID. We also need to do a much,

1 much better job of making sure that guns don't get into
2 the hands of the wrong people, whether that's domestic
3 abusers or those with mental health problems. That's
4 why I believe this commission should look at guns.

5 Rather than being a sign of cowardice, it
6 would show great courage for this commission and this
7 administration to make our schools and our students and
8 our entire country safer, even when it is hard, even
9 when it is about guns.

10 There's so much more that I and students
11 across the nation have to say about school safety, from
12 school-wide tip hotlines and infrastructure
13 improvements to counselors who actually interact with
14 their students once a semester, because that's rarer
15 than you think.

16 There are students that go every day without
17 having their name called, without truly being talked to
18 by a staff member and that can help so much.

19 So regardless of all these issues, I hope you
20 will keep listening and I hope that this can be a
21 start. Thank you. And I know that when we listen to
22 the students, we can and we will find the solution.

1 (Applause.)

2 DR. ZAIS: Is my microphone on? Is my
3 microphone on? Is my microphone on? Thank you, Mr.
4 Yin. And I would like to set the record straight in
5 one regard.

6 There are about 300 million guns in America,
7 according to the Congressional Research Service. And
8 the commission will not be looking at ways to
9 confiscate those weapons or abrogate the Second
10 Amendment.

11 But what we will be doing is looking at
12 specific age limits for the purchase of specific kinds
13 of weapons and we will be examining legal procedures
14 for the confiscation of weapons from people with
15 identified mental health issues. So we will be looking
16 at those narrow aspects of gun ownership.

17 MR. YIN: Thank you.

18 DR. ZAIS: Thank you.

19 MR. YIN: I think that will be a very
20 important step.

21 DR. ZAIS: Thank you.

22 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Lindsay

1 Jones, from NCLD.

2 MS. JONES: Good morning. Thank you for the
3 opportunity to speak with you today and share our views
4 on how to improve school safety.

5 I'm the vice president and chief policy and
6 advocacy officer for the National Center for Learning
7 Disabilities. We are a nonprofit organization that
8 works to improve the lives of the one in five students
9 with learning and attention issues in our schools
10 across this nation.

11 Learning and attention issues include reading
12 and math disabilities like dyslexia, dyscalculia,
13 writing disabilities like dysgraphia and attention
14 disorders. NCLD was formed by parents and continues to
15 be run by parents.

16 For the last 40 years, we've provided
17 essential information to parents and families,
18 professionals and individuals with learning
19 disabilities and attention issues, most recently
20 through our website, understood.org.

21 We also promote research and programs to
22 foster effective learning and advocate for policies to

1 protect and strengthen educational rights and
2 opportunities.

3 In these important conversations about school
4 safety, we must first discuss, as you've heard from
5 every speaker today, issues of school climate and
6 discipline and we must recognize the disproportionate
7 impact these issues have on students with disabilities,
8 particularly students of color with disabilities.

9 There is nothing about having a disability of
10 any type that should mean you are disciplined more
11 often or bullied more often. Unfortunately, that is
12 not the case.

13 Students with disabilities, especially
14 students with disabilities of color, face disparate
15 treatment in our nation's public schools. They are
16 more than twice as likely to be suspended as other
17 students with disabilities, according to data released
18 by the Department of Education's civil rights data
19 collection.

20 More than one-quarter of African-American boys
21 with disabilities received one or more out-of-school
22 suspensions compared to one in 10 white boys with

1 disabilities. Students with disabilities who account
2 for basically about 12 percent of our public school
3 population, account for 25 percent of the arrests at
4 school.

5 Students with learning disabilities --
6 reading, writing, math -- are also 31 percent more
7 likely than their peers without disabilities to face
8 bullying.

9 There is no reason that this should be the
10 reality for students of color or students with
11 disabilities. Behavior does not explain these
12 disparate rates of discipline that they face. Bias
13 does.

14 The guidance issued by the Department of
15 Education and the Department of Justice in 2014 related
16 to school discipline and Title VI is an important tool
17 for schools and must be maintained.

18 I was especially pleased to hear Noelle Ng
19 from the American Association of School Administrators
20 emphasize that it was the least important thing to her
21 members that it be changed. This jointly issued
22 guidance is meant to help educators address bias in

1 discipline practices, improve day-to-day strategies and
2 uphold student civil rights protections in our schools.

3 Instead -- well, the guidance provides
4 educators with actionable tools and strategies to
5 improve these practices and foster a more equitable and
6 welcoming student environment -- school environment for
7 all of our students.

8 We urge you to preserve this guidance and
9 continue to support educators in their efforts to
10 implement these equitable discipline practices.

11 Hardening our schools, meaning increasing
12 police presence, installing metal detectors or allowing
13 teachers to bear arms, is not the answer.

14 I'm pleased with the statement you just made,
15 the clarification. It's good to hear that information
16 and receive a little more information about what some
17 of the broader statements meant.

18 We actually have evidence that these types of
19 hardening measures may perpetuate the problems that
20 we're already seeing and worsen treatment of and
21 outcomes for students with disabilities and students of
22 color.

1 A report by the National Association of School
2 Psychologists found that there is no evidence that
3 using metal detectors, security cameras or guards in
4 schools actually prevented school violence and instead
5 can have an impact, a negative impact on students'
6 sense of safety, in particular our historically
7 disadvantaged students like students with disabilities
8 and those of color. Increasing police presence in
9 schools may actually further this disproportionate
10 treatment.

11 Finally, we urge you to invest in proactive,
12 evidence-based strategies to improve school safety and
13 climate. We were pleased to see the first visit of the
14 commission focusing on positive behavior implementation
15 and supports.

16 Positive behavior implementation and supports,
17 PBIS, fosters a positive school climate, is evidence-
18 based and has been working for students with
19 disabilities and others for over two decades at least.
20 And yet, it's still not in most schools in our nation.

21 There is funding for this already approved and
22 authorized through the Every Student Succeeds Act under

1 multi-tiered systems of supports and under the
2 Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act.
3 Improving and increasing this practice should be a key
4 priority for this commission.

5 These are important issues facing our schools
6 today. There are clear ways forward. The disability
7 community shared experiences can shed light on how to
8 improve school safety for all students. Thank you
9 again --

10 DR. ZAIS: Ms. Jones, I'm going to have to ask
11 you to wrap it up.

12 MS. JONES: Oh, sorry. Thank you again for
13 the opportunity to speak to you today.

14 DR. ZAIS: Thank you very much, Ms. Jones.

15 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Donna
16 Mazyck, National Association of School Nurses.

17 MS. MAZYCK: Good morning. I'm Donna Mazyck,
18 executive director of the National Association of
19 School Nurses. And I'd like to thank you for the
20 opportunity to speak to the commission this morning.

21 What do you say when a third grade student
22 asks a trusted teacher if she is safe from violent

1 intruders in the school? Who coordinates students,
2 families, school staff and community providers in the
3 management of chronic health conditions like asthma,
4 like anaphylaxis, like epilepsy in order to support
5 students' safety and learning?

6 How do you press past the frustration with
7 social factors that impact the health of children and
8 youth? How can school system leaders help children in
9 their districts feel safe as well as have their
10 physical and social and emotional needs met in the
11 school environment?

12 The National Association of School Nurses
13 envisions school communities where students are
14 healthy, safe and ready to learn. This requires a
15 mindset that is followed by evidence-based prevention
16 and intervention.

17 The National Association of School Nurses is a
18 professional membership association of school nurses.
19 What we know is that a healthy school environment
20 begins with a student-centered, collaborative approach
21 by leaders within schools and in communities. The
22 whole school, whole community, whole child model

1 centers on the whole child and incorporates 10
2 components vital for a healthy and safe school
3 environment.

4 School health services is one of those
5 components and I'll share some information about that
6 with you. The school nurse is a key leader to promote
7 and enhance student safety, wellness, engagement and
8 learning.

9 That third grade student who is anxious and
10 wondering if she could be safe from violent intruders
11 in her school relies on the trusted teacher who in turn
12 depends on that school administrator who convenes a
13 team, a multidisciplinary team to make sure that they
14 are prepared for emergencies.

15 They include community partners and they plan,
16 mitigate, train and practice responses to the plan that
17 they develop. The specialized instructional support
18 team, which includes school counselors, school nurses,
19 school psychologists and school social workers, focus
20 on the counseling, psychological, social and emotional
21 climate of that school.

22 Violent acts such as school shootings threaten

1 the safety and wellbeing of students and school staff.

2 As with any complex and multifaceted issue, a
3 multidisciplinary approach, including research, enables
4 comprehensive and coordinated prevention, early
5 identification and early intervention.

6 The school nurse is a leader and integral
7 partner in developing plans for first aid, facilitating
8 evacuation, caring for students with disabilities,
9 performing triage responsibilities, educating and
10 training staff, providing surveillance and reporting.

11 The school nurse is an effective communicator
12 and educator responsible for sharing information about
13 health risks and connecting students and families to
14 providers who can offer immediate crisis care and
15 support and refer to appropriate mental health services
16 for long-term support.

17 By assisting students with the management of
18 their chronic health conditions, the school nurse
19 contributes to risk reduction, increased classroom
20 time, decreased student absenteeism, improved academic
21 success and cost savings to families and educational
22 and healthcare systems.

1 School nurses are educated to identify
2 physical complaints that are co-occurring with
3 behavioral health concerns. Thus, school nurses are
4 often a student's first point of entry into behavioral
5 health services.

6 School nurses are also part of the day-to-day
7 school experience and are easily accessible to students
8 seeking assistance with behavioral health issues. We
9 believe that mental health concerns from a prevention,
10 from an early identification and intervention
11 perspective are absolutely necessary for safe schools.

12 A new district school nurse organized a
13 wellness committee that would oversee implementation of
14 wellness policy activities in her district. Parents,
15 school superintendent, principals, school nurses and
16 school staff, as well as community members became a
17 part of that committee.

18 They completed the CDC's school health index,
19 which is a self-assessment and a planning tool. And
20 that wellness committee ended up with information that
21 helped them to learn the school's strengths and growth
22 opportunities. And their next step involved

1 identifying recommendations to foster a healthy and
2 safe school environment. We believe those self-
3 assessments are important.

4 DR. ZAIS: I'm going to have to ask you to
5 finish up.

6 MS. MAZYCK: NASN's vision is that all
7 students are healthy and safe in schools. Now is the
8 time for making schools healthy and safe environments.
9 NASN will provide specific recommendations at the email
10 that you gave us previously.

11 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Mazyck.

12 MS. MAZYCK: Thank you.

13 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Jamison
14 Coppola, the American Association of Christian Schools.

15 MR. COPPOLA: Thank you for the opportunity to
16 share some thoughts on school safety. I am Jamison
17 Coppola, and presenting these comments on behalf of the
18 800 schools represented by the American Association of
19 Christian Schools, or AACCS.

20 We are a nonprofit organization of private
21 Christian schools organized in 37 states and regional
22 associations with schools all across America. We are

1 very thankful for the work of this commission and we do
2 pray, as people of faith, as we continue to work to
3 help find solutions to the incredibly sobering reality
4 that our children are victimizing each other in the
5 very places our society has dedicated to their growth,
6 care and nurturing.

7 Each new report of school violence brings with
8 it the sobering reality that something is truly broken
9 and must be fixed. As part of the overall education
10 community in our great country, we grieve with the
11 families, teachers and friends who have had the lives
12 of those they love lost and those who have had their
13 lives permanently changed by violence perpetuated by
14 their very classmates.

15 We are honored to offer the following thoughts
16 in the hope that they will be a help to you in the
17 important work you are doing to return safety to our
18 schools.

19 We understand that in times of crisis,
20 sometimes the pragmatic concerns of the moment drive
21 the conversation for immediate practical solutions like
22 hardening school soft spots, having armed guards or

1 developing better security practices or even
2 interventions for troubled students.

3 While all of these solutions provide
4 additional measures of protection and must be
5 considered, we encourage the commission to remember
6 that there is a spiritual dimension to this problem.
7 There are issues of the heart that affect behavior.
8 School safety will be best achieved in an environment
9 that teaches virtue and expects noble character.

10 If we ignore this fact of life, we end up with
11 students like the ones described by C.S. Lewis in his
12 book, *The Abolition of Man*. He described hardhearted
13 people as men without chests. He diagnosed an
14 education system that didn't teach virtue and character
15 in this way.

16 He says, "In a sort of ghastly simplicity, we
17 remove the organ but still demand the function. We
18 make men without chests and expect of them virtue and
19 enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find
20 traitors in our midst."

21 The Greeks also, from whom we've received many
22 of our ideas on education, understood that the best

1 education was in the pursuit of what they called the
2 good, the true and the beautiful.

3 This pursuit really is the goal of all
4 education. We must return to the idea that these
5 values are worth pursuing in our schools and
6 classrooms.

7 We must have a common standard that is
8 actively taught in our schools of what virtue is and we
9 must encourage students and all citizens to pursue
10 these virtues in their actions.

11 Of course, as a group of Christian schools, we
12 believe these virtues are best revealed in the life of
13 Jesus and recorded in the Bible.

14 Additionally, as we encourage the pursuit of
15 virtue, we do understand that more can be done to
16 prevent these tragedies from occurring.

17 Our association encourages the commission to
18 look to the private school community who has pursued
19 many best practices in facility security, including
20 things like digital surveillance and building access,
21 routine safety drilling, the arming of responsible
22 members of the school community as well as ongoing

1 training and updating of safety protocols, while
2 increasing our community awareness through
3 communication safety strategies that include parents,
4 teachers and students.

5 We understand that many worthy ideas have
6 already been shared and solutions will be provided. We
7 encourage the commission to make clear that as
8 solutions are provided, that the commission remind
9 local law enforcement and education agencies to include
10 the private and faith-based school communities in their
11 planning and preparations and to also include parents,
12 the primary educators of children, private school
13 leaders and students who wish to participate in these
14 programs.

15 We believe that the best solutions will be
16 found in cooperation between local law enforcement,
17 local security professionals and in the local private
18 and public school communities where these solutions will be
19 implemented.

20 We encourage the commission to use their
21 expertise to encourage cooperation in the broader
22 school community as we work together productively to

1 achieve these solutions. Again, we thank the
2 commission for their work and efforts to protect
3 students and to provide safe learning environments for
4 our children.

5 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Coppola.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Mary
8 Kingston Roche, the Institute for Educational
9 Leadership.

10 MS. KINGSTON ROCHE: Good morning. My name is
11 Mary Kingston Roche. I'm the director of public policy
12 for the Coalition for Community Schools, which is an
13 alliance of over 200 national, state and local partners
14 who pursue the mission to unite school, community and
15 family for young people's success.

16 I'd like to share with you how the community
17 school strategy can bring a community together to help
18 keep students safe and urge you to recommend this
19 strategy in any guidance you release.

20 In our discussions about how to prevent more
21 school shootings and keep students safe, adequate
22 security is essential, but not enough. We must ensure

1 that we are meeting every student's needs, emotionally
2 and physically, that we create for them a sense of
3 belonging in their school, that they have at least one
4 caring adult in their lives and that they are engaged
5 and challenged.

6 The community school strategy fulfills all of
7 these goals, not by the school going it alone, but by
8 partnering with a community to provide these supports
9 and opportunities.

10 What does this look like? A community school
11 acts as the hub where people come together to support
12 students to succeed.

13 It implements four essential practices: one,
14 integrated student supports, meeting any need, whether
15 social-emotional or physical that students have; two,
16 enriched and extended learning time and opportunities,
17 offering a student-centered curriculum emphasizing
18 real-world learning and extending into after school and
19 summer; three, family and community engagement that
20 incorporates parents' voices into decision-making and
21 offers family support and enrichment; and four,
22 collaborative leadership, which distributes leadership

1 to integrate student, parent and community voice into
2 decision-making.

3 This work is guided by a community school
4 coordinator who leads the process of an assets needs
5 assessment, then facilitates community partnerships to
6 supplement the work of the school to meet these needs
7 and interests to help students succeed.

8 I'd like to share with you a brief example of
9 how the community school strategy turned around a
10 school that was unsafe to one that is now safe and
11 thriving.

12 In 2003, Reagan High School in Austin, Texas
13 was seen as unsafe after one student tragically stabbed
14 another student to death. Trust was lost. Enrollment
15 declined. The graduation rate was under 50 percent and
16 the district threatened to close the school.

17 In response, a committee of parents, teachers
18 and students presented a plan to turn Reagan into a
19 community school, which the district accepted. After
20 engaging the school community through a needs
21 assessment, the school designated a coordinator,
22 implemented the community school strategy and is in a

1 completely different place today.

2 It partnered with Austin Community College to
3 adopt the early college high school curriculum. It
4 established a student-led youth court with the
5 University of Texas at Austin Law School and a
6 restorative justice program that together have reduced
7 discipline issues dramatically.

8 The school went to having around 10 volunteers
9 and mentors to over a hundred. Today, five years after
10 adopting the community school strategy, Regan is
11 graduating 85 percent of their students, enrollment has
12 more than doubled and it's a safe, nurturing place to
13 be.

14 Another community school here in D.C. shows
15 that student safety doesn't apply just within the
16 school walls but within the entire community. At an
17 elementary school in ward eight last year, nine people
18 overdosed on the steps of the school, literally
19 bringing the issue of student safety to the school's
20 doorsteps, and a person was shot and killed right
21 across the street from the school.

22 As a community school, the school supports a

1 group of parent organizers who, as a first step, have
2 met with the mayor and city council to petition to move
3 the bus stop to prevent this activity from occurring
4 right outside the school. This example shows that when
5 it comes to keeping our students safe, we must bring
6 our schools and communities together to tackle this
7 issue as one.

8 As you prepare recommendations from this
9 commission, I urge you to highlight community schools
10 as an effective strategy to achieve school safety and,
11 equally important, to help students feel loved, valued,
12 engaged, challenged and ready to learn.

13 Specifically, I urge you to recommend that
14 states and district leverage eligible ESSA funds to
15 implement community schools in support of school
16 safety, especially Title IV, Part A, the student
17 support and academic enrichment grant, where the
18 investment in a coordinator to achieve the goals of
19 this grant is referenced in ESSA.

20 Lastly, I urge you to visit a few community
21 schools over the coming months to see this work in
22 action. My organization is more than happy to

1 coordinate these visits for you, including here in D.C.
2 Through these visits, you can see the practices I
3 mentioned earlier that they have in common and also see
4 how they customize their approach according to their
5 unique school community.

6 Thank you for your consideration and I'm happy
7 to be a resource as you move toward recommendations.

8 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Kingston Roche.

9 (Applause.)

10 MS. MILLER: Next is Zakiya Sankara-Jabar,
11 Dignity in Schools Campaign.

12 MS. SANKARA-JABAR: Good morning. Thank you
13 for the opportunity to be here today and address you on
14 this topic of school safety. Again, I'm Zakiya
15 Sankara-Jabar. I am with the National Dignity in
16 Schools Campaign.

17 Dignity in Schools Campaign is a national
18 organization made up of over 120 members in 26 states,
19 including the District of Columbia. Our base of our
20 membership are mainly parents and students. We also
21 have policymakers, lawyers and educators that are also
22 a part of the campaign.

1 I would be remiss if I did not also mention
2 that I'm also a parent of two black children in
3 Montgomery County, Maryland. So this is an issue that
4 is very important to me both professionally and
5 personally.

6 One of the things that I really want to
7 address today is the topic of more police and arming of
8 other school personnel. It is the belief of the
9 Dignity in Schools Campaign that funneling more money
10 to police and armed school staff is not the answer to
11 preventing violence in schools.

12 We believe that we must invest in counselors,
13 social workers, restorative justice coordinators,
14 community intervention workers, peacebuilders and other
15 supportive school staff that actually create safer
16 schools.

17 It will not solve the problem. There is no
18 evidence that armed personnel or more police in schools
19 actually creates a safer school environment. Examples
20 of armed police in schools were present at the Virginia
21 Tech shooting, Columbine and unfortunately Parkland as
22 well.

1 The majority of mass shootings end when the
2 shooter decides to end them and not by intervention of
3 law enforcement, according to an FBI study. It harms
4 the entire school environment, including parents,
5 students, teachers and other school personnel.

6 Students are already facing violence from
7 armed and unarmed law enforcement in their schools and
8 even in their communities, including fatal and life-
9 threatening injuries. Even trained police can miss
10 their targets more than four out of five times in
11 gunfire, according to an NYPD study.

12 Students of color, especially black students,
13 face the greatest risk. School-based arrest rates and
14 corporal punishment are much more higher to black
15 students and Latino students and studies have shown
16 that the subjects are more likely to shoot black
17 students in split-second situations. And we already
18 see tragic consequences of that nationally.

19 There has been also an increase in anti-
20 immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments in schools. And
21 so, that creates an unsafe environment as well. When
22 police are in schools, they tend to get involved in

1 school discipline, often escalating these incidents
2 that might have been resolved with a trip to the
3 principal's office or to the counselor's office.

4 Having police in schools and punitive school
5 cultures makes it less likely that students will trust
6 adults in the building, come forward with concerns that
7 they may have about other students. For immigrant and
8 undocumented students, bringing police in schools can
9 lead to a deportation for themselves and their
10 families.

11 We need real safety. Preventing violence in
12 schools requires both long-term and short-term
13 solutions. Social and emotional learning, restorative
14 justice teach young people how to manage their emotions
15 and respond to conflict in healthy ways.

16 Counselors, wraparound services and strong
17 relationships with caring adults for struggling
18 students is what is needed. It keeps students who may
19 need interventions from failing -- from falling through
20 the cracks.

21 Having entrances and halls monitored by
22 supportive school staff like community intervention

1 workers and peacebuilders who know the student body,
2 who come from the communities where the students live
3 can prevent issues and address those issues as they
4 come up because there's a relationship there.

5 School resource officers are police. They're
6 not counselors. They're not social workers. Students
7 deserve trained mental health professionals and telling
8 students that they can have an SRO for counseling is
9 counterproductive and unfortunately it's just not true.

10 Quick facts related to the Parkland shooting
11 that support our arguments: four armed police were on
12 the site and did not prevent or end the shooting. The
13 shooter interacted with law enforcement many times
14 previously. He was the subject of trips to the FBI and
15 had police receive calls about him at least 17 times.

16 The Broward County superintendent said that
17 after the shooting, that mental health supports in
18 Broward was not sufficient. This is extremely
19 important to all of us as parents and students. We
20 believe that social --

21 DR. ZAIS: I'm going to have to ask you to
22 finish up.

1 MS. SANKARA-JABAR: Sure. Social-emotional
2 learning, restorative practices and transformative
3 justice is what creates safer schools. Thank you for
4 the opportunity. Counselors, not cops.

5 (Applause.)

6 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Hashim
7 Jabar, Racial Justice NOW!

8 MR. JABAR: Greetings. I am Hashim Jabar,
9 interim director of Racial Justice NOW!, based in
10 Dayton, Ohio with a satellite office in Washington,
11 D.C.

12 Our mission is to dismantle structural and
13 institutional racism in all areas of people activity.
14 Our primary focus is on the institution of education
15 and lifting up the voices of disempowered black parents
16 and children.

17 We are dedicated to stopping the school-to-
18 prison pipeline and focus specifically on holding
19 institutions accountable to equitable distribution of
20 services and resources to black people in Dayton, Ohio
21 and around the state of Ohio.

22 I would like to start by sharing the title of

1 a recent Washington Post article from May 19, 2018.
2 The title said "Texas school had a shooting plan, armed
3 officers and practice. And still 10 people died".
4 There's no research, no information, no evidence that
5 more police in schools would create a safer
6 environment.

7 Additionally, if we are honest, mass shootings
8 do not occur in the urban environment, aka black and
9 brown environments. The mass shootings do not occur in
10 black schools and brown schools. So to attempt to
11 solve a suburban, aka white or Caucasian problem, by
12 adding police in schools would be extremely problematic
13 based on the relationship between black students and
14 police officers.

15 We believe in counselors, not cops. We are a
16 part of the Dignity in Schools Campaign. And I would
17 like to share with you three documents that can be
18 found on the Dignity in Schools Campaign website:
19 Counselors, not Cops: Ending the Regular Presence of
20 Law Enforcement in Schools", "A Resource Guide on
21 Counselors, not Cops" and lastly, a document that was a
22 joint issue brief between the Advancement Project,

1 Alliance for Education Justice, Dignity in Schools and
2 the legal Defense Fund of the NAACP. This was done
3 after the Newtown school shootings.

4 Our counselors, not cops campaign is one to
5 end the regular presence of law enforcement in schools;
6 two, to create safe schools through positive safety and
7 discipline measures; and three, to restrict the role of
8 law enforcement that are called into schools.

9 We know that data shows positive alternatives
10 to law enforcement in schools keeps students safe.
11 Police presence in schools has increased over time and
12 contributes to the criminalization of young people,
13 specifically young black people and brown people.

14 Regular police presence in schools results in
15 more arrests for nonviolent offenses that would
16 otherwise be addressed by school personnel. Police and
17 SROs can contribute to a criminalizing, unwelcoming and
18 otherwise unsafe environment in schools. There is no
19 reliable resource -- research demonstrating that SROs
20 keep schools safe.

21 And lastly, students of color are impacted at
22 higher rates by law enforcement in schools. Again, all

1 of these documents are available for you on the Dignity
2 in Schools website.

3 We again believe in counselors, not cops, that
4 students need to be addressed mentally,
5 psychologically, socially and emotionally in the
6 classroom, that we use the resources not to bring more
7 police into schools but to prevent students from taking
8 actions and making them more productive citizens.

9 Youth go to school and unfortunately receive
10 nonverbal communication that they are criminals,
11 walking through metal detectors, being wanded as if
12 they were in a police state instead of a school.
13 Learning is not to -- is to benefit society, rather not
14 simply just to get a job and to stay out of jail.

15 To bring a different perspective, as America
16 is in this unique point in time in its history, we saw
17 the movie of Hidden Figures, these three or four black
18 women that contributed to NASA and America going to the
19 moon, keeping up with their combating nations.

20 As we see in North Korea and Singapore and
21 other areas that have higher levels of education, as
22 American's education slips, we must keep in mind, based

1 on the school-to-prison pipeline, how many minds,
2 scientists, mathematicians and the like are sitting
3 behind bars based on small crimes committed. And so,
4 we believe in counselors, not cops and ending the
5 school-to-prison pipeline. Thank you for your time.

6 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Jabar.

7 (Applause.)

8 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Sarah
9 Mancoll, who is a private citizen.

10 MS. MANCOLL: Thank you for taking the time
11 today to meet with all of us. I am the policy director
12 of a scientific association here in D.C., but I'm here
13 as a private citizen today, as the daughter and
14 granddaughter of educators and also as the mother of
15 three children, one of whom will be entering
16 kindergarten next year. The other two are in pre-K.

17 I'm here today to emphasize the importance of
18 considering the research evidence when making decisions
19 on what school safety measures to endorse. Schools
20 need to know what works, and equally important, they
21 need to know what doesn't work.

22 To illustrate this point, I'll give one

1 example. A colleague of mine recently reached out to
2 me. She lives in Bloomfield, New Jersey. And she told
3 me that her school board was deciding to place armed
4 guards in elementary schools. This school district is
5 deciding what to do and they are following the lead of
6 many other schools, especially in the years following
7 the Newtown shootings.

8 However, importantly the research evidence on
9 the efficacy of armed guards in schools toward creating
10 a safer school environment is lacking. If we don't
11 have good research evidence, how do we know that
12 placing armed guards in elementary schools is a good
13 idea?

14 Moreover, without research evidence, how do we
15 know that we're not causing more harm than good?
16 Successful measures to promote school safety may be
17 intuitive. But they may also be counterintuitive.
18 Without high quality research evidence, we don't know
19 which is which.

20 As the commission moves forward in its work, I
21 encourage it to place importance on the research
22 evidence. There is some excellence basic and applied

1 research being funded and conducted across the federal
2 government, including at places such as the National
3 Institute of Justice, the Institute for Education
4 Sciences, the Centers for Disease Control and
5 Prevention, National Institutes of Health, National
6 Science Foundation.

7 Such research includes studies on the effect
8 of bias on police use of force and on school
9 discipline, studies on the effects of social and
10 emotional learning programs on student behavior and
11 other outcomes and studies on the association between
12 school climate and student learning.

13 The agencies also collect valuable statistical
14 data that are used by states and localities to inform
15 decision-making. This is important work and we need
16 more of it.

17 School safety is an issue of critical
18 importance and we need high quality, rigorously
19 conducted research to better understand what measures
20 do work and what measures do not work to enhance school
21 safety.

22 The federal government has an important role

1 to play in developing this evidence base and in helping
2 states, districts and schools use research evidence to
3 inform their decision-making. Thank you for your time.

4 (Applause.)

5 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Mancoll.

6 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Dr. Earl
7 Franks, from NAESP.

8 DR. FRANKS: Good afternoon. I'm Earl Franks,
9 executive director of the National Association of
10 Elementary School Principals, NAESP, an organization
11 that provides advocacy and support to our nation's
12 elementary and middle level principals and other
13 education leaders and their commitment to all children.

14 We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to
15 make comments related to school safety, which I believe
16 we can all agree is of the utmost concern for our
17 country and especially those of us in education.

18 As a former teacher and school principal, I've
19 always said that student safety is the top priority
20 because a student cannot learn if they do not feel
21 safe. Also, ask any parent and they will tell you that
22 their children's safety is the most important factor

1 when they send them off to school every day.

2 To that end, since the tragedy at Marjorie
3 Stoneman Douglas High School, NAESP has pushed for a
4 nonpartisan, comprehensive approach to improving school
5 safety and mental health services in schools.

6 We realize that school safety and student
7 wellbeing issues are complex. But we believe that the
8 nation must find research-based policy solutions that
9 lead to meaningful change. And I firmly believe that
10 these solutions must begin with those involved in
11 education on a daily basis.

12 Our request and desire is transparent and
13 simple: leveraging work that has been done by many
14 organizations, education-related and otherwise.

15 We would hope that this commission would
16 collaborate with us to identify and elevate strategies,
17 policy recommendations and identify solutions to
18 improve school safety and access to mental health in
19 schools.

20 Additionally, this collaborative process can
21 unite all groups to support policy development and
22 implementation, ensure a comprehensive approach and

1 improve alignment of federal, state and local policies.
2 NAESP, like many organizations speaking today, have
3 developed resources and tools to advance work around
4 school safety.

5 But it is our sincere hope that through
6 genuine collaboration, we can improve awareness of each
7 other's work, break down silos and work collectively to
8 advance a shared mission that meaningfully moves the
9 needle on school safety. Specifically, we want to
10 collaborate to address key questions.

11 First, what should a comprehensive, school-
12 wide approach to improving school safety and mental
13 health services look like? Next, what solutions best
14 support effective design and implementation of programs
15 that facilitate a multi-tiered system of supports?

16 Next, how can the federal government, states
17 and districts align efforts to support the development
18 and implementation of research-based, comprehensive
19 school safety plans? And last, what are the best
20 practices and strategies to support blending state and
21 federal funding streams in education and mental health
22 services?

1 Finally, our hope is for this commission, the
2 United States Department of Education and the
3 administration to partner with us on actionable next
4 steps that will help us collectively create and support
5 policy development and implementation while ensuring a
6 comprehensive approach through the alignment of
7 federal, state and local policies. Thank you for the
8 opportunity to speak.

9 (Applause.)

10 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Dr. Franks.

11 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Brandon
12 Lewis, from the National Urban League.

13 MR. LEWIS: Good afternoon. My name is
14 Brandon Lewis and I too am a former public school
15 teacher.

16 But today I'm here on behalf of the National
17 Urban League, the nation's oldest and largest
18 community-based organization whose efforts are devoted
19 to improving the lives of African-Americans. I have
20 the following statement from our president and CEO,
21 Marc Morial.

22 As president and CEO of the National Urban

1 League and on behalf of its 90 affiliates in 37 states
2 and the District of Columbia, I write to share our
3 ideas with the Federal School Safety Commission on how
4 to keep all children safe in schools.

5 Since January of this year, there have been at
6 least 16 school shootings, frequently resulting in the
7 fatality of both students and staff.

8 In addition to mass shootings, children in
9 urban schools have been subjected to other forms of
10 school violence, including discriminatory and
11 exclusionary discipline practices, excessive and
12 abusive practices from school resource officers and
13 attending schools in under-resourced communities, often
14 in buildings not fit for instruction or learning.

15 We encourage the commission to actively
16 consider solutions to all of these challenges because
17 we believe that all children, regardless of race or
18 income, deserve to attend safe, high quality schools.

19 A June 2017 report found that black children
20 are killed by guns 10 times more often than white
21 children in America. This report was based on data
22 from the Centers from Disease Control and Prevention

1 that looked at gun-related homicides, suicides and
2 unintentional shootings from 2002 to 2014.

3 This disparity is shocking. But what is more
4 alarming is that the population affected has been
5 largely ignored by lawmakers and excluded from the
6 conversation convened by this very body.

7 We encourage the commission to identify and
8 engage black children and teenagers as you begin to
9 weigh how to protect all children from gun violence.

10 Black children, but black girls especially,
11 have always had a leading role in the fight for gun
12 control. The commission risks ignoring this key
13 constituency that can provide valuable insight in
14 determining solutions if their voices are not included
15 in this conversation.

16 The U.S. accounts for less than 5 percent of
17 the global population but owns an estimated 35 to 50
18 percent of all civilian-owned guns in the world.
19 Recent estimates show that U.S. civilian gun ownership
20 as high as 310 million, essentially one gun per person.

21 This commission was formed to address school
22 gun violence, but as of today is unwilling to talk

1 about gun control measures. In fact, members of this
2 commission have openly supported the idea of arming
3 teachers, in effect supporting the idea of putting more
4 guns into schools. We believe this represents a direct
5 threat to black children and teens.

6 Members of this commission have also advocated
7 for the repeal of the Gun Free Zone Act of 1990, which
8 bans weapons in and around public and private K-12
9 schools.

10 Instead, we recommend commonsense gun control
11 measures including stricter enforcement of existing gun
12 laws, more rigorous and expanded background checks that
13 are aligned across federal and state agencies and new
14 federal legislation banning military-grade weapons and
15 high-capacity ammunition clips.

16 Additionally, we encourage the commission to
17 reject all calls for the rescission of the current
18 federal school discipline guidance. We believe that a
19 return to the racially biased school discipline
20 practices of the past in the name of safety is both
21 careless and irresponsible.

22 The National Urban League remains eager to

1 engage with the Department of Education and the Federal
2 School Safety Commission to encourage holistic,
3 comprehensive solutions to school safety for black
4 children and teens. Thank you.

5 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Lewis.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. MILLER: Right now, that concludes the
8 folks that are in the room. We had six more who
9 registered for this morning's session. I'm going to
10 call out their names. If you're here, please let me
11 know.

12 Charles Curtis, Nicole Davis, Kym Martin, Joe
13 McTighe, Sasha Pudelski or Robert Stephens. If any of
14 those folks are in the room, you may speak at this
15 time. If not, that concludes our morning session.

16 DR. ZAIS: We will reconvene at 1:30. Thank
17 you very much.

18 (Whereupon, the foregoing went off the record
19 at 12:11 p.m., and went back on the record at
20 1:31 p.m.)

21 AFTERNOON SESSION

22 DR. ZAIS: If we could be seated, we'll get

1 started. I'm joined at the panel by a new
2 representative from the Department of Homeland
3 Security, Todd Klessman. Todd, you want to -- and the
4 rest of us are the same folks you saw earlier today.
5 All righty. Meredith?

6 MS. MILLER: We're going to hear from Dr.
7 Evelyn Carter, from EAC Consulting.

8 DR. CARTER: Good afternoon to the federal
9 commission members and to the audience and thank you
10 for allowing me to speak. My name is Dr. Evelyn
11 Carter, and I'm from Time to Teach Center of Teacher
12 Effectiveness.

13 School safety and school success also depends
14 on classrooms with positive environment free from
15 bullying, free from confrontation, free from conflict.
16 I'm going to give you five components to promote school
17 success.

18 Yes, we do need to arm our teachers. We need
19 to arm them with, number one, maintaining self-control
20 and composure in all situations. Predict and avert
21 problem situations before they surface. Take the right
22 course of action when challenged.

1 Step two, arrange the classroom for maximum
2 achievement. Keep students visually focused on top
3 priorities. Teach them from the teaching power
4 position. Step three, teach to and enforce rules and
5 procedures. We all know that we have rules and
6 procedures. But do we teach them? Do we do lessons on
7 them?

8 Step four, be firm. Be fair. Carry out
9 disciplinary actions. Learn to stop letting minor and
10 major challenges interrupt important teaching time.
11 Stop avoiding difficult students or situations. Handle
12 negative classroom situations effectively. Detect and
13 correct problems before they surface.

14 And step five, build and maintain strong
15 student-teacher relationships. Yes, they need to see
16 us caring. Learn to build and maintain trust with
17 challenging students. Energize apathetic students and
18 have them working as never before.

19 Does this work? Let's ask a principal from
20 Reading, California. His suspensions dropped from 39
21 percent to 18 percent over a three-year period. Let's
22 ask a principal from Henderson, North Carolina. His

1 office referral went from 300 to two and suspensions
2 down from 150 to none. Thank you very much.

3 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Dr. Carter.

4 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from John
5 Kelly, from the National Association of School
6 Psychologists.

7 DR. KELLY: Good afternoon. My name is Dr.
8 John Kelly. I'm a school psychologist and president of
9 the National Association of School Psychologists. On
10 behalf of NASP and our 25,000 members, I would like to
11 thank the commission for the opportunity to share
12 evidence-based suggestions for how we can improve
13 school safety and prevent violence.

14 NASP has played a leadership role on these
15 issues for a long time. We are committed to working
16 with this administration, Congress and other
17 educational policy leaders to ensure that our schools
18 and communities have the capacity to keep students
19 safe, support their mental health needs and foster
20 their successful learning.

21 I encourage the commission to reference our
22 written statement as well as the framework for safe and

1 successful schools. I'd be happy to leave a copy with
2 you, if permitted to do so. This was authored by NASP
3 and other educational associations.

4 The good news is that we actually know a lot
5 about what really works to create safe and supportive
6 schools. The hard news is that none of what works
7 involves soundbite solutions, the purchase of a single
8 program or security system or, quite frankly, the over-
9 hardening of our schools. Rather, real school safety
10 requires comprehensive, integrated and sustained
11 approaches outlined in the framework.

12 I'd like to highlight three key factors this
13 afternoon. First, addressing students' mental health
14 needs is critical. Doing so is central to school
15 safety, not just from the perspective of violence
16 prevention, but in terms of overall student wellbeing
17 and learning.

18 As a high school psychologist, I work to meet
19 students' mental and behavioral health needs. In every
20 instance, my ability to help these students has relied
21 upon my specific training and the fact that I am in the
22 building and accessible to students and staff. This

1 may seem obvious. But too many schools do not have
2 adequate access to school psychologists, school
3 counselors or school social workers.

4 Unlike our community-based mental health
5 employees, school-employed mental health professionals
6 are specifically trained to provide services within the
7 learning context. We understand how to work with
8 school staff to identify struggling students and
9 incorporate interventions into the school day.

10 I also work closely with community providers
11 serving students who need more intensive services.
12 Unfortunately, the country is facing a critical
13 shortage of school-employed mental health professionals
14 as well as limited mental health resources for children
15 and youth in the community. This is bad for kids,
16 their teacher and their families.

17 However, I just spent the past few days with
18 the Boston public schools, where they have a highly
19 effective model for addressing the mental and
20 behavioral health needs of students. This is led by
21 school psychologists and social workers, in partnership
22 with Children's Hospital and the University of

1 Massachusetts. We'd be happy to share more about this
2 model with the commission if it is interesting to you.

3 Second, school climate and positive
4 relationships are the foundation of school safety. My
5 students trust me. They trust their teachers. They
6 feel they can ask for help when they need it. Students
7 need to trust that adults are going to do the right
8 thing if they reach out.

9 One key component to this trust is that we
10 balance physical and psychological safety. We employ
11 reasonable security measures such as locked doors,
12 controlled entry to the building, use of SROs and
13 monitored hallways. But we don't try to turn our
14 learning environments into a fortress.

15 Importantly, arming teachers is not the
16 answer. Doing so places an unrealistic, unreasonable
17 burden on American educators and we can undermine the
18 sense of a safe, supportive learning environment.

19 Our nation must focus on approaches that
20 genuinely safeguard the wellbeing of our children as
21 well as school staff who work to educate, empower and
22 protect children every day. Putting more guns in

1 schools is not one of those approaches. Rather, we
2 work to create a school climate in which all students
3 feel valued, supported and connected.

4 Key to this is the use of effective positive
5 discipline strategies that focus on reinforcing
6 positive behavior, preventing and addressing negative
7 behavior and keeping students in school.

8 An overreliance upon zero tolerance policies,
9 suspension and expulsion contributes to the school-to-
10 prison pipeline and could put students at an increased
11 risk for dropping out, risky behaviors and involvement
12 in the criminal justice system.

13 Schools can and should address negative
14 behaviors and connect students to the necessary
15 supports that they need to be successful rather than
16 pushing them out.

17 And finally, third, every district needs
18 appropriately trained multidisciplinary school safety
19 and crisis response teams. Ongoing training of the
20 teams should encompass prevention and early
21 intervention, as well as response and recovery to
22 prepare for critical events.

1 This includes conducting effective lockdown
2 drills, collaborative planning with community
3 responders and training school mental health
4 professionals with the skills and techniques to provide
5 quality risk assessments and threat assessments, as
6 well as interventions to support psychological
7 recovery. I served on the team to help support the
8 reopening of Stoneman Douglas --

9 DR. ZAIS: I'm going to have to ask you to
10 wrap it up.

11 DR. KELLY: Sure. I'm almost done. I served
12 on the team to open Stoneman Douglas schools in
13 Florida. I know what it takes to create these safe
14 environments.

15 In conclusion, we need to do more as a nation
16 to address the underlying violence, the causes of
17 violence and enact meaningful gun safety legislation
18 that reduces inappropriate access to weapons.

19 As the commission develops recommendations, it
20 is imperative that we stay focused on evidence-based
21 efforts that we know work to prevent violence and keep
22 our children safe. We look forward to working with you

1 towards this goal. Thank you so much.

2 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Dr. Kelly.

3 DR. KELLY: Can I leave this?

4 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Zach
5 Scott, from the National Association of Secondary
6 School Principals.

7 MR. SCOTT: Good afternoon. Thank you for the
8 opportunity to provide our recommendations to achieve
9 our common goal of making schools the safest possible
10 learning environments where each student can flourish
11 and fulfill their greatest potential.

12 Once again, my name is Zachary Scott, and I
13 serve as the senior manager of federal engagement and
14 outreach at the National Association of Secondary
15 School Principals.

16 We are the voice of leaders and the home of
17 millions of student leaders affiliated with the
18 National Honor Society and the National Student
19 Council.

20 Our members, who have been affected by gun
21 violence, know the names and dreams of every student
22 gunned down in their school. And when the TV cameras

1 leave and horrified supporters return to their regular
2 lives, the principals remain to lead the school on the
3 path of recovery and healing. On their behalf, I offer
4 these recommendations.

5 First, we must abandon the notion of arming
6 teachers and principals and other school personnel or
7 eliminating gun-free zones and other proposals
8 championed by the gun lobby, born of a belief that
9 putting more guns in schools will make kids safer.

10 Such proposals stem from a desperate and well-
11 intentioned need to do something, anything to make
12 parents and community members believe schools are
13 safer. But the effect would be the opposite. Schools
14 would be even more susceptible to acts of violence,
15 rather than safer from it.

16 No credible evidence suggests that more guns
17 in schools equals more safety. In fact, the growing
18 number of accidental shootings and mishaps with guns in
19 schools, even in the hands of trained professionals,
20 tells exactly the opposite.

21 If this commission, as Secretary DeVos
22 testified to the Senate Education Committee, intends to

1 not address the role of guns in school violence, then
2 it should certainly not be advocating for the
3 proliferation of guns in schools.

4 Second, we must recognize that safety is the
5 ultimate responsibility of the school principal and
6 maintained by a vigilant staff and student body. They
7 must feel empowered to report potentially violent
8 behavior and they will only report it if the school
9 culture is built on a foundation of trusting
10 relationships between students and adults.

11 Each student in the school must feel known and
12 valued, even those students who are well-known only for
13 their infraction of the rules.

14 The commission learned last week about the
15 power of PBIS to both promote positive behaviors and
16 respond to infractions in a way that maintains the
17 student as a valued member of the school community.

18 The same can be said of restorative justice
19 models. The 2014 discipline guidance issued by the
20 Departments of Education and Justice promotes these
21 models and other alternatives to suspensions and
22 expulsions. It encourages schools to examine their own

1 discipline data, identify disparities, ask why and
2 adopt policies to correct them. We strongly encourage
3 the commission to reaffirm the guidance in its final
4 recommendations.

5 Third, the nation must more purposely in
6 mental health supports both inside and outside of
7 schools. This is not to stigmatize those who suffer
8 from mental health issues, who are far more likely to
9 be victims than perpetrators of violence.

10 But we need reliable mechanisms to identify
11 potentially violent behavior before the potential is
12 realized. Once a risk is identified, school
13 psychologists, counselors and social workers can
14 intervene to forestall the violent behavior, but just
15 as important to help remediate an illness and give a
16 potential perpetrator an opportunity to live a
17 successful life.

18 None of these recommendations are new. But
19 then, neither is the challenge of school safety. The
20 charge of this commission for the past few months is
21 the same charge the education community has been living
22 for the past few decades.

1 The consensus of the education community, more
2 than 100 education and law enforcement organizations,
3 was captured in the 2013 framework for safe and
4 successful schools, which John actually just shared
5 with all of you.

6 I hope the members of this commission can
7 reclaim some time on your busy calendars with an
8 awareness that many of the answers you seek are already
9 known. Does this framework contain all of the answers?
10 Of course not. It would be foolish to declare anything
11 absolute.

12 So I encourage the commission to keep seeking
13 new, effective practices. The nation's principals will
14 be an eager audience. But I urge you at the same time
15 to redirect efforts towards codifying and funding the
16 interventions we already know to be effective.

17 Regardless of who is in charge, one of the
18 town's favorite strategies for making tough policy
19 questions disappear is the blue ribbon committee.
20 President Trump himself recently mocked such committees
21 while addressing the urgency of the opioid crisis.
22 This body has an opportunity to break that mold and I

1 hope you will do so for the sake of our students and
2 for all of those who share the future of those students
3 that they will lead. Thank you for your attention.

4 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Scott.

5 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Amanda
6 Fitzgerald, from the American School Counselors
7 Association.

8 MS. FITZGERALD: Good afternoon. Thank you
9 for taking the time to hear from members of the
10 community on this very important topic. My name is
11 Amanda Fitzgerald, and I represent the American School
12 Counselor Association.

13 We are a nonprofit membership organization
14 representing over 35,000 school counseling
15 professionals, most of whom work in a K-12 education
16 setting. Through a comprehensive school counseling
17 program, school counselors work with all students in a
18 school and implement programs that support their
19 academic, career and social-emotional development.
20 School counselors deliver these services through whole-
21 class instruction, small group lessons and one-on-one
22 counselling to support individual student planning.

1 We acknowledge and appreciate the recent
2 federal investment in the student support and academic
3 enrichment grants funded under Title IV(a) of the Every
4 Student Succeeds Act.

5 However, it is important to note that this
6 program is not a school safety program. The program
7 funds many critical school programs, many of which have
8 nothing to do with school safety. It is imperative
9 that there are standalone investments put in place to
10 address these urgent concerns.

11 The American School Counselor Association has
12 three primary points that we hope the commission takes
13 into serious consideration.

14 One, increase funding to increase the number
15 of school counselors, school psychologists and school
16 social workers in schools.

17 School counselors provide many services,
18 including career exploration and college access
19 initiatives and they also are key in providing a safe
20 and supportive school climate, social-emotional
21 learning and many of the tier one and universal
22 prevention services that the commission just learned

1 about on your visit to a PBIS school last week.

2 Mental health issues, exposure to trauma,
3 grief, deployment of a parent are just some of the
4 things many of our students go through in the course of
5 their K-12 career. These issues do not discriminate
6 based on social status or family structure and they can
7 happen in any community, to any student or to any
8 family.

9 This is why it is crucial that schools are
10 staffed with adequately trained professionals that can
11 increase the likelihood students who may be struggling
12 are identified as early as possible and provided early
13 interventions either in schools or through referrals to
14 community agencies.

15 ASCA recommends a school counselor to student
16 ratio of 1:250. But the reality is much higher.
17 According to the National Center for Educational
18 Statistics, the average ratio for the 2014-15 school
19 year was 1:482, nearly double the recommendation.

20 Arizona and California have a ratio of 1:924
21 and 1:760 respectively. And Secretary DeVos' home
22 state of Michigan is the third highest in the country

1 at 1:729. The current reality is unacceptable.

2 Our second request is for an increased
3 investment in prevention and early intervention
4 services, especially in the elementary schools. Often
5 policy and funding are created and determined as a
6 reaction to a tragedy. And as we know, these tragedies
7 are becoming alarmingly more frequent.

8 There are many evidence-based programs that
9 are being implemented in schools that have significant
10 positive results. Research supports the value of
11 school-wide positive behavioral support programs.

12 And when implemented in elementary schools,
13 they can help reduce the number of behavioral
14 referrals, suspensions and instructional days lost and
15 can hopefully identify students who may be at risk.

16 The entire school staff must be involved in
17 these programs for them to be effective. Classroom
18 teachers cannot do it alone.

19 They are currently responsible for the high
20 quality instruction of 20 to 30 students and in schools
21 without student support personnel, they are required to
22 be responsible for addressing student social-emotional

1 and physical needs too. School counselors and other
2 support personnel are necessary to implement these
3 programs to garner the best results.

4 Our third and final point is to simply state
5 we strongly oppose any effort to arm educators in our
6 schools or any proposal that would offer financial
7 incentives for educators to carry firearms.

8 In closing, the American School Counselor
9 Association is committed to working together with all
10 stakeholders necessary to ensure our students and staff
11 are safe when they enter a school building every single
12 day.

13 We are confident with swift action and an
14 emphasis on increasing the number of state-certified
15 school counselors, school social workers and school
16 psychologists to assist with the prevention, early
17 identification and early intervention services, this
18 could be reality.

19 I look forward to working with each of your
20 agencies to turn these recommendations into a reality.
21 And I would encourage you to connect with school
22 counselors in all types of K-12 settings to hear

1 firsthand of the amazing work they do every day for the
2 nation's students. Thank you for your time.

3 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Fitzgerald.

4 MS. MILLER: Next is Shaun Dakin, from Dakin
5 Associates.

6 MR. DAKIN: Hi. Thank you for having me here.
7 My name is Shaun Dakin and I'm here as the dad who is
8 the father of a middle school student in Falls Church,
9 Virginia. I am also a gun violence prevention advocate
10 who was moved to volunteer after Sandy Hook.

11 After Sandy Hook, I decided to look at the
12 numbers. I'm a data guy and I have an MBA. I also
13 teach digital marketing at the university level. So
14 when I started looking at the data around school
15 shootings and gun violence in the U.S., I was outraged,
16 as I'm sure most people are when they can see the cold,
17 hard data.

18 America is an exceptional nation. This is
19 what I didn't know. I didn't know that the U.S. has a
20 gun homicide rate that is almost 25 times any other
21 civilized nation. I didn't realize that nearly 96
22 Americans die every day from guns and I didn't know

1 that the majority of gun deaths, 62 percent, are from
2 suicide.

3 I didn't know that almost 20 veterans commit
4 suicide every day. I just did not know. I also didn't
5 know that seven children under the age of 19 die every
6 day because of guns.

7 So I became a gun violence prevention advocate
8 working to reduce the number of gun deaths every day in
9 every city and every community in the United States in
10 order to work on the safety of my community and my
11 schools.

12 I didn't know that our gun laws are so lax. I
13 didn't know, for example, in Virginia, where I live, I
14 could go on the Internet, buy an AR-15, pay cash online
15 with no background check, no license, no training, no
16 registration, pretty much nothing other than my cash.
17 And I could take that assault weapon and I could open
18 carry it around my town, which is located 10 miles from
19 the White House. And it's entirely legal.

20 I didn't know how easy it is for anyone to buy
21 a gun, any weapon in America and do whatever he or she
22 wants. In fact, when I tell my friends about these

1 laws, it's unbelievable. They simply don't believe it.

2 So to make our schools safe, we need to
3 strengthen our gun laws. I also didn't know that the
4 majority of school shooters obtained their guns from
5 family members. I didn't know that according to the
6 Asking Saves Lives program, which is Brady and the
7 American Association of Pediatrics, one out of three
8 homes with children have guns that are unlocked.

9 I didn't know each day nine children and teens
10 are shot in gun accidents and 80 percent of
11 unintentional firearm deaths occur in the home. The
12 Sandy Hook shooter had an arsenal of guns in his home,
13 guns his mother had purchased for him.

14 I learned that according to the recent report
15 from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the leading
16 cause of death of children age 10 to 17 is suicide. I
17 also learned that the American Academy of Pediatrics
18 recommends that families with a depressed teen develop
19 a safety plan to restrict the young person's access to
20 lethal means of harm, which includes firearm access.

21 I also didn't know that many gun owners who
22 consider themselves safety specialists and responsible

1 gun owners leave their guns unlocked and unsecured in
2 the home. The result, angry young men who are feeling
3 hurt and bullied and depressed and perhaps a girl had
4 spurned their advances or broken up with them have easy
5 access to guns in America.

6 I didn't know that angry young men could go
7 into his parents' closet and obtain murder machines. I
8 didn't know there are no real gun store laws in America
9 and I didn't know there are few laws to hold adults
10 responsible when their own secured guns are used to
11 murder children.

12 Okay. A recent study by Johns Hopkins School
13 of Public Health, Bloomberg School of Public School,
14 said that 54 percent of gun owners say they do not keep
15 their guns locked in a safe room and that only 37
16 percent of gun owners in the state of Washington lock
17 away their guns. So these unsecured guns in the hands
18 of angry young men lead to the murder of school children.

19 You know what I learned? I grew up overseas.
20 And you know what I learned? Everybody abroad watches
21 Hollywood movies with lots of violence. Everyone plays

1 American videogames with lots of violence. Everyone
2 has angry young men with mental health issues. The
3 only thing that makes it different in America is that
4 we arm these angry young men with deadly murder
5 machines and we make it as easy to buy as getting a
6 Frappuccino.

7 All right. So there are many things I didn't
8 know. But here's what I do know. I know that gun
9 storage laws work. I know that age restrictions for
10 gun purchases work. I do know that red flag laws or
11 gun violence restraining orders work and I know that
12 licensing and permitting works.

13 DR. ZAIS: I'm going to have to ask you to
14 wrap it up, please.

15 MR. DAKIN: Sure. I will finish with
16 something that I don't know. I don't know if our
17 nation has the moral courage to do something
18 significant about saving our children's lives.

19 And I don't know whether this administration
20 has the moral courage to do something to save our
21 children's lives. However, I do know there are many
22 solutions that we can implement that can save lives

1 today. Thank you.

2 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Dakin.

3 (Applause.)

4 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Lu Ann
5 McNabb.

6 MS. MCNABB: Thank you, Dr. McCance-Katz, Mr.
7 Klessman, Ms. Hart and Deputy Secretary Zais. My name
8 is Lu Ann Maciulla McNabb and I'm speaking as an
9 individual.

10 On Sunday, April 22, 2007, I kissed the exit
11 wound on the forehead of Reema Samaha, even though her
12 mother, my close and dear friend, wanted me to focus
13 only on her hands, which remained untouched.

14 Reema was one of the 32 killed at Virginia
15 Tech on April 16, 2007, gunned down in her French
16 classroom along with another young lady I knew, Erin
17 Peterson.

18 Erin was an only child and we all believed
19 that her father died of heartbreak on March 18, 2016.
20 Reema and Erin would have been 30 this June 23rd and
21 August 17th respectively. But they will remain forever
22 18.

1 I have come to know the survivors of the
2 Virginia Tech tragedy and some from Columbine and
3 Newtown. School shootings not only affect the
4 immediate and extended family, but also friends,
5 neighbors and communities. The young people who knew
6 those who died will never forget and their lives have
7 been forever changed.

8 You have formed this commission to gather
9 recommendations to prevent what seems to be an
10 increasing number of school shootings, to the point
11 that we all pray for summer so students no longer fear
12 being caught in the crossfire. These are mine.

13 One, encourage schools, colleges and districts
14 to create threat assessment teams similar to what
15 Virginia did after Virginia Tech. Gather teachers and
16 faculty, students, administrators and other staff to
17 meet and assess students who might be a threat.

18 Two, ensure the community colleges have the
19 same access to mental health resources the four-year
20 colleges have. Three, invest in mental health funding,
21 counselors and research. This is just as important as
22 investing in academics, art and athletics.

1 Encourage memorandum of understanding between
2 medical facilities and schools and colleges so both are
3 aware of students who go back and forth. Make sure
4 these students receive the attention, support and
5 resources that they need.

6 Five, review balancing the privacy of students
7 who may be a threat with the safety of the greater
8 student body. To protect one at the expense of all has
9 led and will lead to tragedy if schools and
10 universities fear lawsuits.

11 Six, make sure that all within a school,
12 administrators, educators, support staff and students,
13 beware the red flags. Social media warnings,
14 threatening notes left behind, chained doors, marked
15 changes in behavior or dress and students who frighten
16 their fellow students and teachers.

17 Seven, institute programs that encourage and
18 reward actively caring and positive behavior among all
19 who work and attend schools. Eight, make sure that
20 court orders and reinforced or enforced.

21 Nine, look into the responsibility of family
22 members who give guns, provide easy access to guns or

1 fail to lock up guns when they know their fellow family
2 member is struggling with issues that can lead to harm.

3 Ten, require background checks on all gun
4 purchases. Guns should only be in the possession of
5 law-abiding citizens, not those who would do harm.

6 School safety is not compromised of just one
7 issue, but many. And we are fools not to look at every
8 single facet of every school shooting and determine how
9 we can prevent them from happening again because no
10 child, no teen or no adult should lose their life
11 because we do not have the courage or will to implement
12 those actions we know are necessary. Thank you.

13 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. McNabb.

14 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Rabbi Abba
15 Cohen, Agudath Israel of America.

16 RABBI COHEN: Thank you very much to comment
17 on this most vital issue of the day. I am Rabbi Abba
18 Cohen. I serve as vice president for federal affairs
19 for Agudath Israel of America, which is the national
20 Orthodox Jewish organization.

21 In that capacity for the past 30 years, one of
22 my primary responsibilities has been to be a liaison on

1 behalf of the entire network of Jewish -- Orthodox
2 Jewish educational institutions, from kindergarten
3 through higher ed.

4 I endorse much of what was said before.
5 Certainly the threat facing America's schools makes it
6 critical to significantly increase the resources
7 available for their protection and I also agree with
8 the notion that we need a broad, multipronged approach
9 that considers all options to addressing the threat.

10 But I would like to speak specifically to two
11 points. The first point is that we must address the
12 threat facing all schools. Jewish schools, like other
13 religious schools and private schools, face the same
14 dangers other schools face from individuals within the
15 school.

16 Disgruntled students, teachers,
17 administrators, parents and workers may be found in any
18 school. Mentally troubled individuals may live in any
19 community connected to a school. All pose potential
20 threats and appropriate steps must be taken to address
21 the causes of this danger and to prevent them in
22 whatever setting they may be found.

1 All children, no matter the school they attend
2 -- public, private or religious -- deserve to learn in
3 a safe and protected environment. Schools are schools.
4 Children are children. And they must all be protected.

5 And I just want to note that I know in all of
6 your departments, in some of the more recent programs,
7 whether it deals with school safety or whether it deals
8 with disaster relief or things of that nature, public,
9 private and religious schools have been included within
10 the programs that have been implemented. And that we
11 encourage you to continue.

12 I'd like to address a second point and that is
13 there is also an additional threat that many schools,
14 particularly Jewish schools, face from outside the
15 school that is unique and of a different sort.

16 It is a threat to which some schools are
17 undoubtedly more vulnerable than others. And I'm not
18 singling out Jewish schools. I just represent Jewish
19 schools.

20 But it could just as easily be applicable to
21 any school that faces anti-racial or anti-ethnic or
22 anti-religious hatred and bias. It emanates from the

1 scourge of extremism and terrorism.

2 In the case of Jewish schools, the anti-
3 Semitic fanatics, foreign and domestic, known and
4 unknown, have vowed to bring violence specifically upon
5 Jews and Jewish institutions in the United States and
6 around the world.

7 It comes from supremacists, extremists,
8 terrorists and others full of hatred and bigotry. And
9 children are no less in their scopes than others.
10 There's nothing theoretical about this concern. And
11 Jewish targets remain in a condition of continuous high
12 alert.

13 Schoolchildren are tempting targets to
14 bloodthirsty haters and we have too many reminders that
15 the evil of extremism is a clear and present danger to
16 our community and the threats of our lives and our
17 children's lives is a very real one.

18 Explicit acts of violence, as well as numerous
19 reported occurrences of suspicious and threatening
20 phone calls have come to our schools in several major
21 metropolitan areas.

22 This is reality in which we are forced to live

1 and we appeal to you that proper and effective
2 attention and energy be directed to schools like ours,
3 those that not only face internal threats emanating
4 from disturbed, troubled, disgruntled individuals
5 connected to the schools, but also those that face the
6 very different external threat from domestic and
7 foreign extremists bent on death and destruction.

8 So in conclusion, I would say of course we
9 need more resources and we have to think broadly. We
10 have to protect all children and all schools.

11 And we must also take into account not only
12 the internal threat, but also the external ones related
13 to anti-racial, anti-ethnic and anti-religious bias and
14 hatred. Thank you for listening.

15 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Rabbi Cohen.

16 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Donna
17 Colombo, from the Virginia PTA.

18 MS. COLOMBO: Good afternoon. Thank you for
19 the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is
20 Donna Colombo and I am the president-elect for Virginia
21 PTA and, more importantly, a mother and grandmother of
22 public school students.

1 Virginia PTA has more than 200,000 members
2 across the commonwealth, concentrated almost entirely
3 in public schools. Our primary goal is to build
4 educated and engaged families so that they may build
5 productive and strong relationships with their schools.

6 As we work to build and strengthen those
7 relationships, we must first begin the process of
8 understanding each other's needs and how we can support
9 those needs.

10 Above all else, parents want to know that
11 their students are going to be safe when they drop them
12 off at school. The tragedies in schools around the
13 country have our PTAs having hard and important
14 conversations about school safety.

15 Associations like ours are taking the lead on
16 initiatives to guarantee that each student is returned
17 safely at the end of their school day. Teachers,
18 parents, administrators, law enforcement, legislators,
19 community members, we have all had enough and we are
20 looking for answers.

21 Here's what we know. Guns have no place in
22 schools. Access to firearms is a problem. It is far

1 too easy for untrained and unlicensed citizens, even
2 minors, to access firearms.

3 Budgets are stretched so tightly that many of
4 our school divisions are not able to install even the
5 most basic security systems. School safety is our
6 problem, not just a state's problem, not just a
7 division's problem, but a national problem.

8 We do not need to make fortresses out of our
9 schools. We need to guarantee that every school is
10 able to fund and install state of the art security at
11 each entrance or exit or even just locks on every door.

12 PTAs are digging in to help fund even basic
13 safety measures because often our localities cannot.
14 The responsibility to fund proper safety equipment
15 falls squarely on our state and federal government.

16 We do not need to harden our schools. We need
17 to strengthen the support systems for students and
18 families. We do not need to add more officers. We
19 need to add more guidance counselors.

20 Every year, our schools are forced to do more
21 with less. So students in need of emotional support go
22 unnoticed. Every year, more school nurses are cut and

1 we fail as a community, as a nation to reach our most
2 precious members of our society, our children.

3 At a recent meeting of education stakeholders,
4 we heard a school safety expert make this point. We
5 must address both sides of violence, access and motive.
6 Trying to solve one or the other just won't work.

7 Guaranteeing a safe and nonviolent environment
8 for a student is something on which we can all agree.
9 And if you haven't heard anything else, please hear
10 these points on access and motive.

11 We must address the issues of access to guns
12 in our country. We must demand universal background
13 checks and licenses to purchase all firearms. We must
14 reenact a federal ban on assault rifles. We must
15 address the issue of motive in our country.

16 We must prioritize mental health education,
17 early intervention and funding for services and
18 personnel. We must provide resources to build mental
19 and behavioral health system capacity within schools
20 and communities to ensure students can receive a
21 proactive continuum of behavioral and mental health
22 services.

1 We must provide the necessary resources to
2 ensure adequate ratios of school counselors, school
3 psychologists, school social workers and school nurses
4 who are the most qualified professionals to provide
5 school-based mental health services.

6 PTAs and parents around the country are
7 demanding necessary resources to ensure that services
8 and security are provided in an equitable way so that
9 every child returns home each day, so that when my
10 children leave for school, I don't have to worry every
11 day whether I will see them alive again. That is not
12 acceptable for any of us. It is not acceptable for my
13 family.

14 PTAs and parents around the country want you
15 to know that this is the most important thing that we
16 can do right now together. Thank you for allowing
17 Virginia PTA and PTAs across the country to be heard.

18 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Colombo.

19 MS. COLOMBO: Thank you.

20 MS. MILLER: Next is Mary Welander, from Sandy
21 Hook Promise Organization.

22 MS. WELANDER: Good afternoon. Thank you,

1 Madam Secretary, Attorney General Sessions, Secretary
2 Azar, Secretary Nielsen for holding this listening
3 session today and for giving us all the opportunity to
4 speak. And thank you to the esteemed representatives
5 of these departments who are here to listen this
6 afternoon.

7 My name is Mary Welander and I am speaking on
8 behalf of Sandy Hook Promise, a national organization
9 that is working to prevent violence in our schools and
10 communities.

11 I am the promise leader ambassador for the
12 state of Connecticut. I also serve on the Orange Board
13 of Education, the board of the PTA and I am a mother of
14 three elementary school-aged children.

15 When I learned of the possibility of speaking
16 with you today, I reached out to our superintendent,
17 principal and board of education chair to ask what
18 issues they are facing and what they would want me to
19 share with you.

20 We discussed the security measures that had
21 already been taken in our schools. But what
22 consistently came up was the need for better

1 communication and mental health supports, especially as
2 social media has exacerbated the issues related to
3 isolation and bullying.

4 Schools across the country are struggling
5 without the school counselors and school psychologists
6 that they need and when teachers or staff do identify
7 possible at-risk behaviors or warning signs in
8 students, they are met with parents reluctant to
9 identify and label their child as a problem.

10 All of the educators I spoke to agreed that we
11 need programs unilaterally introduced to all schools
12 that teach inclusiveness and understanding, as well as
13 ways to prevent violence before it happens.

14 Investing in low-cost, effective prevention
15 now could eliminate many of the problems faced in our
16 schools every day and provide a strong starting point
17 for further evaluation.

18 Sandy Hook Promise has trained over three-and-
19 a-half million students and adults to know the signs of
20 violence and to take action to prevent it.

21 This is done through programs that begin with
22 younger children, such as the Start with Hello program,

1 to build connectivity in schools and then progresses on
2 to say something and school threat assessment to
3 empower students to know the signs of violence and act
4 and to help schools identify and intervene threats from
5 school shootings to suicides.

6 These evidence-based programs, which only cost
7 \$1 per student to implement, have already helped avert
8 multiple school shootings, suicides, reduced bullying
9 and improved the climate and culture of thousands of
10 schools. And these programs are accessible to all
11 schools, not just the few that have a big budget or in
12 a big city.

13 This commission was created to address school
14 safety. The way to make something safer is to create
15 an environment in which that issue doesn't exist, not
16 try to mitigate the damage once it is already started.

17 Our district was fortunate enough to be in a
18 position to take aggressive steps toward fortifying the
19 hard shell of our schools. But I have heard over and
20 over again that those measures don't stop a shooting
21 from happening. They only slow them down once they
22 have started.

1 On top of that, most schools are not able to
2 take these steps or hire new security personnel such as
3 SROs. I know the president has already indicated
4 strong support for the Stop School Violence Act and
5 scaling this work to all schools.

6 We now need your leadership and your
7 departments to spread the word about these proven
8 prevention programs and to provide funding and
9 technical assistance so that schools apply and train
10 their students and staff in order to make their
11 communities, their schools and their children safer.

12 School violence is preventable and we have
13 solutions. With your help, we can get them into the
14 hands of every student.

15 When we do the work to identify students who
16 may be at risk of hurting themselves or others, we then
17 need to ensure that our schools have a strong
18 foundation of mental health supports so that students
19 are given help to succeed and not just expelled.

20 Increasing funding for additional school
21 psychologists and school counselors would make it
22 easier to identify and help students in need so that

1 they stay in school and don't become chronically
2 isolated without getting the attention and then
3 treatment that they need.

4 The day after the massacre at Parkland, I was
5 driving my kids to school. I got into the drop-off
6 lane. We waited our turn. When I pulled up, I said to
7 my kids, okay, give mama a big hug today.

8 And I realized in that moment that I was
9 holding onto them for just that extra second because I
10 was smelling their hair. I was taking a minute to
11 smell my children's heads in case they were killed at
12 school that day. That is a moment I have a very hard
13 time processing still.

14 I speak for the hundreds of promise leaders in
15 Connecticut, the thousands of promise leaders across
16 the country and for every parent when I ask that the
17 commission recommend an increased federal investment in
18 both proven prevention programs and school mental
19 health professionals to ensure that we train, support
20 all students now and do not wait multiple generations
21 to protect our children. Thank you so much for your
22 time.

1 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Welander.

2 MS. MILLER: Next, we're going to hear from
3 Congressman Lou Barletta.

4 REP. BARLETTA: Thank you for the opportunity
5 to appear before you today. And I'm pleased that in
6 creating this commission, President Trump has
7 recognized the need to address student safety and
8 secure our schools.

9 As the father of four daughters, two that are
10 school teachers, and eight grandchildren, this is an
11 issue that hits very close to home for me.

12 You know, we all have memories of our days in
13 school. I think every single one of us could probably
14 tell a story about something that happened in
15 elementary school. We could probably think of our
16 junior high school days and come up with memories there
17 and obviously our high school days are memories that
18 stay with us every day.

19 So you know, the memories we have in school
20 are something that last with us for our entire
21 lifetime. Unfortunately, the children today will grow
22 up with a different kind of memory than you and I had,

1 worrying each day if what we're seeing happening in
2 other places will happen there.

3 I think we can all agree that no student
4 should ever go to school in fear and no parent should
5 have to send their child to school worrying what might
6 happen to them while they're there.

7 As a member of Congress who sits on both the
8 House Committee on Education and Workforce and the
9 House Committee on Homeland Security, I want to assure
10 you that when the commission provides its
11 recommendations to keep students safe at school, I will
12 fight to ensure that Congress acts on those
13 recommendations as quickly and as efficiently as
14 possible.

15 The sad reality is that our schools are
16 dangerously under-secured and programs to increase
17 school security and dangerously underfunded. As I go
18 to work at the United States Capitol every day, I pass
19 vehicle barricades. I work in a building where there
20 are armed guards with machine guns and metal detectors
21 and police dogs.

22 Yet while myself and my colleagues go to work

1 every day without any fear of attacks, today again,
2 today again our children and our teachers will go to
3 school hoping that nothing happens to them. It's
4 embarrassing and unacceptable.

5 If we as government officials can protect
6 ourselves, we can do the same for our students.
7 Schools need to have the means to implement security
8 measures that work best for their students and the
9 federal government needs to provide the guidance and
10 support for them to do so.

11 That's why I introduced the Protecting Our
12 Kids Act, which, as you know, the Department of
13 Homeland Security provides federal agencies and
14 buildings across the country with safety standards to
15 ensure that these federal sites and the employees
16 within them are protected from any and all threats.

17 We look at our federal buildings and we make
18 sure that they are secure. Well, my bill would direct
19 the Department of Education to work with the Department
20 of Homeland Security provide schools with security
21 standards and guidelines within 60 days of becoming law
22 so that educators and administrators can have the tools

1 they need to protect their students.

2 You know, as we know, one size will not fit
3 all and that won't work for schools either. We can't
4 legislate security here that will work in every school
5 across the country.

6 That's why my bill would not mandate any
7 blanket security protocols, but rather provide an
8 additional tool for schools to use to determine what
9 improvements can be made that best fit the unique needs
10 of their students and their facility.

11 Securing our schools and prioritizing the
12 safety of our nation's children should not be a
13 difficult decision for us here in Washington.

14 Responding to school violence is not a
15 partisan issue. Yet we find ourselves in the same
16 situation, tragedy after tragedy, failing to take
17 action while conversations about long-term solutions
18 take place.

19 When it comes to school safety, we can't waste
20 another day talking instead of acting. When a crazed
21 gunman shot up the congressional baseball practice last
22 year, threatening the lives of several of my

1 colleagues, our response was instant. Republicans and
2 Democrats alike came together and acted.

3 There was an increase in security to protect
4 members of Congress, an increase to even protect our
5 staff. There was more money available. It started
6 flowing, bulletproof glass. We could even protect my
7 home. I could even put a security system in to protect
8 my home.

9 There were no partisan attempts to hold up the
10 money for these security measures as a bargaining chip.
11 The funding went out the door to help protect us
12 immediately while other discussions continued to
13 happen. You know, people move fast around here when
14 they're worried about our own safety, about the safety
15 of our own families and our own friends.

16 So I'm going to ask the same question that
17 I've asked my colleagues. Why can't we move at the
18 same speed when it comes to the safety of our nation's
19 students?

20 Why do we think that our lives are more
21 important than the lives of some child around America,
22 that we can go into buildings that are so secure and we

1 could work without any fear?

2 But today again teachers and students will go
3 to school hoping it's not them. I recognize that
4 securing our schools is not just one part of the puzzle
5 and that many other actions are required to find a
6 solution to the violence our nation's students have
7 seen.

8 But I hope that what you have heard today will
9 help the commission in fulfilling its mission of
10 quickly providing meaningful and actionable
11 recommendations to keep students safe at school.

12 I also promise to be a strong partner with you
13 on a congressional side in putting these
14 recommendations into action.

15 Our children deserve to grow up in an
16 environment that is free of fear and violence, where
17 they are able to make memories like the ones that we
18 have that can still make us smile decades later.

19 Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity
20 to testify today and I look forward to working with the
21 commission and my colleagues in Congress to address
22 these issues and provide our nation's students with the

1 safe learning environment that they deserve. Thank
2 you.

3 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Congressman Barletta.

4 REP. BARLETTA: Thank you.

5 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Annie
6 Acosta, from the Arc of the United States.

7 MS. ACOSTA: Good afternoon, and thank you for
8 the opportunity to provide comments on how to improve
9 school safety. My name is Annie Acosta and I'm with
10 the Arc of the United States.

11 The Arc is the largest community-based
12 organization for people with intellectual and
13 developmental disabilities. The Arc has a network of
14 over 650 chapters across the country, promoting and
15 protecting human rights and full inclusion in the
16 community.

17 We serve people with a variety of diagnoses,
18 including autism, Down syndrome and fetal alcohol
19 syndrome. The Arc greatly appreciated the department's
20 commitment to making schools safer for students and
21 school personnel. But we're concerned about the
22 potential to make a bad situation worse by expanding

1 ineffective and overly harsh disciplinary policies.

2 We need to have better, not necessarily
3 tougher approaches. There's a high risk of unintended
4 consequences for people with disabilities in some of
5 the administration's proposals.

6 It is imperative that the commission not focus
7 on the diagnoses of a few bad actors and instead ensure
8 that people with disabilities or mental illness are
9 part of the broader conversation around school safety.

10 We therefore request that the commission do
11 the following. One, take a comprehensive view of
12 school safety. The issue is broader than the mass
13 tragic shootings that dominate the headlines.

14 School safety is also about interpersonal
15 violence, victimization, restraint, seclusion and
16 bullying, which occur far more commonly and, with most
17 of these, take place both inside and outside of the
18 school.

19 For instance, recent preliminary data show
20 that there were 47 school-associated violent deaths per
21 year while there were nearly 750,000 instances of
22 victimization among students ages 12 to 18 at school

1 and over 600,000 such instances away from school.

2 Two, address populations that are most
3 affected by school violence. We know that a range of
4 school violence experiences are more common among
5 certain groups, including students with disabilities.

6 We also know that individuals with
7 disabilities are more likely than their peers to be
8 restrained, secluded, bullied and socially isolated.
9 We urge the commission to ensure that there are
10 specific recommendations for these populations.

11 Three, recognize that positive school climate
12 is an essential element of school safety. The number
13 and quality of social relationships has long been
14 recognized as the leading determinant of physical and
15 mental health.

16 Schools with positive school climates help
17 foster positive relationships by teaching emotional
18 skills such as self-regulation, problem-solving and
19 empathy. They also emphasize adult modeling behavior
20 such as how to respectfully disagree or admit fault.
21 Any recommendations to support schools to improve
22 school climates must include specific provisions that

1 include the unique needs of students with disabilities.

2 Fourth, explore the root causes of students'
3 problem behaviors. Much has been learned in recent
4 years about the lasting effects on children who have
5 been exposed to abuse, neglect, violence or death.

6 As a result of these adverse childhood
7 experiences, they may act out with defiance, aggressive
8 behaviors or self-harm. Students with disabilities in
9 particular who experience both higher rates of abuse
10 and social isolation sometimes need additional support
11 to express themselves appropriately.

12 However, challenging behaviors are often a
13 manifestation only of the disability itself. For
14 instance, students with autism who act out due to
15 sensory overload need to have properly trained school
16 staff who understand their behaviors and proper calming
17 techniques.

18 The commission should support recommendations
19 to differentiate between these types of behaviors and
20 those that actually pose genuine threats to safety.

21 Five, prioritize evidence-based approaches.
22 The Arc urges the commission to reject approaches with

1 no proven effectiveness such as proposals to arm
2 teachers. The research on such proposals is very
3 clear. More guns do not make students and teachers
4 safer.

5 Instead, we urge the commission to look at
6 evidence-based practice such as positive behavior
7 intervention and supports, restorative justice, family
8 involvement and trauma-informed practices.

9 Six, address the proper role of school
10 resource officers, or SROs. As the commission looks to
11 improving school safety, there will certainly be
12 conversations about SROs.

13 These officers have an important role in
14 keeping students safe. However, we have seen a
15 troubling trend in SROs becoming involved in
16 disciplining students with disabilities.

17 We urge the commission to ensure that SROs,
18 the vast majority of whom carry handcuffs, a gun, Mace
19 and a Taser, are not involved in disciplinary issues
20 for students with disabilities. Behaviors are at times
21 their only way to communicate and deciphering these
22 behaviors, what leads to them and how to de-escalate

1 takes training and expertise.

2 And lastly, maintain the Department of
3 Education's school discipline guidance. The 2014
4 guidance focuses on internal school climate and ongoing
5 school discipline practices rather than acute threats
6 posed by intruders.

7 The guidance only explains in easy to
8 understand language the obligations schools have under
9 current civil rights law to conduct school discipline
10 in non-discriminatory ways.

11 DR. ZAIS: I'm going to have to ask you to
12 wrap it up.

13 MS. ACOSTA: Last sentence. It in no way
14 preclude school staff and others from addressing actual
15 threats of harm. Thank you again for the opportunity
16 to comment.

17 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Acosta.

18 MR. TALBERT: Our next speaker is Eliza Byard,
19 who's with GLSEN.

20 MS. BYARD: Thank you very much for this
21 opportunity. My name is Eliza Bayard and I am the
22 mother of two school-aged girls, as well as the

1 executive director of GLSEN, a longtime organizational
2 partner to the Departments of Education, Justice and
3 Health and Human Services working together to improve
4 school climates in all 50 states.

5 My comments today focus on upstream approaches
6 to addressing root causes of student alienation,
7 anxiety and fear.

8 I'm pleased to report that recent history
9 provides concrete experience that shows it is possible
10 on a national scale to reduce violence among students
11 and mitigate the impact of mental health issues,
12 experiences of injustice, adult cruelty or
13 indifference, the experiences that can in extreme cases
14 lead to lethal violence.

15 With federal leadership on school climate and
16 safety, including a deep and systemic focus on civil
17 rights oversight and enforcement, our country had as of
18 2016 begun to turn the tide on bullying and bias
19 violence in our K-12 schools.

20 According to this department's own report
21 drawn from the 2015 school crime supplement, a vast
22 collective effort led by the Departments of Education

1 and Health and Human Services managed to affect an 11
2 percent drop in rates of bullying nationwide between
3 2007 and 2015. During that same period, the use of
4 hate language by students also declined by 3 percent
5 nationwide.

6 GLSEN has been deeply invested in this effort
7 for more than 28 years, focused on the multiple
8 specific challenges faced by LGBTQ students who exist
9 in every community and are of every race, religion,
10 national origin, ability and immigration status that
11 there is.

12 Our student constituents face more hostile
13 school climates than their heterosexual peers and feel
14 less safe as a result. LGBTQ students are also at
15 higher risk of experiencing disproportionate and
16 discriminatory school discipline and being pushed out
17 of their schools than are their non-LGBTQ peers.

18 In GLSEN's decades of work on promoting safe
19 and inclusive schools, we have learned what works to
20 prevent these harmful outcomes. Effective strategies
21 to increase safety and respect for all students include
22 increasing mental health resources in schools and

1 ensuring that providers are prepared and willing to
2 help all of the students who come through the doors of
3 their offices.

4 Providing professional development for
5 education professionals on cultural competency and
6 systems of positive behavioral interventions and
7 supports. Creating anti-bullying and harassment
8 intervention policies that specifically require
9 attention to bias-based victimization of students by
10 their peers and by their schools.

11 Ensuring that restorative justice practices
12 are utilized in the classroom and that discriminatory
13 differential discipline practices are identified and
14 eliminated from school systems.

15 To this end, we hope the commission recognizes
16 at this point that the Department of Education must
17 maintain the rethinking school discipline guidance
18 which is an invaluable guide to school districts and
19 schools on effective and equitable approaches to
20 necessary discipline.

21 Unfortunately, the last 18 months also provide
22 a stark lesson in how federal action can directly

1 instill fear, anxiety and uncertainty in students'
2 daily lives.

3 Last fall, UCLA released a study of the
4 experiences of public school teachers nationwide and
5 found a dramatic increase in student anxiety, stress
6 and incivility in 2017. Teachers reported a pervasive
7 sense of fear that was most acute for black and Latino,
8 Muslim, immigrant, disabled and LGBTQ youth.

9 Federal actions, including the precipitous
10 withdrawal of guidance on trans students' rights, fears
11 of immigration enforcement actions at schools, public
12 statements calling this department's civil rights
13 commitment into question and a pervasive tone of
14 disrespect on the basis of personal bias have taken a
15 concrete toll on students' sense of safety and
16 belonging both at school and ultimately as members of
17 our national community.

18 Our government's actions matter, for good and
19 for ill. We can and must do better by every single
20 child in this country if we truly believe that they are
21 endowed by their creator with certain inalienable
22 rights. This work is hard.

1 DR. ZAIS: I'm going to have to ask you to
2 wrap it up, please.

3 MS. BYARD: Last sentence. This works is
4 hard. But it is not rocket science.

5 It requires time, funding, wide-ranging
6 collaboration and a fundamental willingness to
7 acknowledge that we must address systemic and
8 historical biases and discrimination in order to truly
9 improve the lives of every single student in this
10 country. Thank you.

11 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Byard.

12 MR. TALBERT: Our next speaker is Robert Hull,
13 with the National Association of State Boards of
14 Education.

15 MR. HULL: Good afternoon, commission members
16 and representatives. My name is Robert Hull. I'm the
17 executive vice president at the National Association of
18 the State Boards of Education, which we fondly refer to
19 as NASBE.

20 Thank you for hosting this forum this
21 afternoon and offering all of us a chance to share
22 expertise on the urgent question of how to create a

1 safe and health learning environment for all of our
2 students.

3 Last week's field visit by this commission to
4 the elementary school in Maryland is a great example of
5 the power of dialogue between policymakers,
6 practitioners and researchers by sharing new ideas,
7 what's working, lessons learned and critically
8 examining educational systems in place, the commission
9 can address school safety in a manner that exemplifies
10 informed, research-based policymaking.

11 NASBE serves and strengthens state boards of
12 education in their role as the citizens' voice in
13 education. State board members include business and
14 community leaders, faith leaders, teachers, principals,
15 administrators, superintendents, parents and, in 17
16 states, remarkable and insightful students.

17 State boards are deeply committed to
18 preventing school violence so all our students can
19 thrive and achieve. They are committed to collaborate
20 with others to achieve that goal. In March alone, one
21 in three school boards discussed ways to address school
22 safety and student wellness.

1 I want to briefly share what we have learned
2 from state boards since the Parkland shooting in
3 February. First and foremost, school safety is
4 multifaceted and no one single solution will suffice.
5 We need to improve the physical safety of school
6 buildings.

7 Board discussions in Massachusetts, Nebraska,
8 Oklahoma and other states revealed that this is no easy
9 task. But they remain committed to ensuring schools
10 are well-resourced and that educators receive timely,
11 evidence-based training.

12 We also need to tackle the root causes of
13 violent behavior -- isolation, loneliness and the
14 inability to cope with anger, anxiety or depression.
15 State boards are addressing all these dimensions.

16 Physical safety measures such as drills and
17 emergency preparedness, as well as measures to ensure
18 students' wellbeing through family engagement, teacher
19 training and social and emotional supports.

20 There is a growing consensus among our members
21 that we must do more to coordinate a whole host of
22 preventative measures, developing positive school

1 climates, providing quality mental health services and
2 addressing the needs of the whole child, the whole
3 school and the whole community.

4 Connecticut, Kansas, Illinois, Michigan and
5 Washington have committed to working together as a
6 cohort of states to discuss successes, challenges and
7 innovations in leveraging social and emotional learning
8 to best fit their local needs.

9 These states and more recognize that
10 developing social-emotional learning in the K-12
11 setting has a positive impact on school safety,
12 absenteeism rates, school discipline, school climate
13 and overall academic achievement.

14 We encourage you to consider how
15 implementation of promising practices could vary in
16 diverse contexts, from rural schools to urban ones.

17 The capacity of a small school district in a
18 sparsely populated area where the superintendent also
19 drives the bus is vastly different from that of an
20 urban or a suburban school. Please consider holding
21 these types of listening sessions and field visits in
22 localities that represent this diverse and broad

1 landscape.

2 Second, protecting the precious lives of our
3 students deserves our fervent and immediate efforts.

4 We concur with Secretary DeVos' statement that we
5 simply cannot allow this trend to continue.

6 It is the responsibility of all of us to
7 ensure that students do not continue to face the trauma
8 of losing classmates, siblings and teachers to another
9 act of school violence.

10 Third, the conversation must remain front and
11 center. This work must not end with the commission's
12 final report. Rather, that report should issue a call
13 to action for state boards and other education leaders
14 to keep learning, gathering data, conducting research
15 and building evidence to better inform policymaking and
16 practice.

17 Don't let this be just another report on the
18 shelf. Instead, develop a working document whose
19 usefulness and effectiveness is assessed as actions are
20 implemented. Encourage institutions of higher
21 education to develop partnerships with their states and
22 local districts to ensure they are supported with

1 current research, continue to refine their practice and
2 analyze the data to ensure their practices are
3 achieving the desired outcomes.

4 As you consider recommendations, examine both
5 the potential intended and unintended consequences.
6 Will the policy make schools safer in the short-term
7 and the long-term? What resources are necessary to
8 carry out that policy?

9 No one student's or teacher's life is more
10 valuable than another's. Therefore, we must ensure
11 that equity is the guiding principle on this ongoing
12 conversation. Only with a stalwart commitment to
13 learning can we hope to prevent further senseless loss
14 of life.

15 NASBE would be pleased to connect you to the
16 state board members who can discuss these strategies
17 that they have developed. NASBE stands ready to
18 partner with you in this work. Thank you.

19 DR. ZAIS: Thank you very much.

20 MR. TALBERT: Our next presenter is
21 Bartholomew Devon. He's with the organization Autism
22 Speaks, Incorporated.

1 MR. DEVON: Good afternoon, Deputy Secretary
2 Zais, Ms. Hart, Mr. Klessman and Dr. McCance-Katz. My
3 name is Bartholomew Devon. I serve as manager of
4 public policy at Autism Speaks.

5 Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting
6 solutions across the spectrum and throughout the
7 lifespan for the needs of individuals with autism and
8 their families. We do this by increasing understanding
9 and acceptance, advancing research into causes of
10 autism and advocating for improved services for people
11 with autism spectrum disorders and related conditions.

12 Autism Speaks is grateful for the opportunity
13 to make recommendations to the Federal Commission on
14 School Safety. Today, we wish to highlight three
15 points that we believe are critical to ensuring the
16 safety of students with autism in our nation's public
17 schools.

18 Our first recommendation relates to elopement.
19 According to research published in the Journal of
20 Pediatrics, about one in three children with autism
21 wander each year, leaving a safe area or a responsible
22 caregiver for more than a brief period. Wandering is

1 more than an inconvenience to teachers or a worry for
2 parents. The consequences of wandering can be lethal.

3 We encourage the Bureau of Justice Assistance
4 at the Department of Justice to use its discretion to
5 fund initiatives that better prepare school and law
6 enforcement personnel to address the dangers of
7 wandering.

8 The Department of Education has developed a
9 resource document on wandering, shared with us for
10 informal stakeholder feedback. We believe that the
11 document will help schools address wandering. Autism
12 Speaks applauds the department's efforts in preparing
13 the document and encourages the document's prompt
14 release.

15 Our second recommendation relates to law
16 enforcement training. According to the Office of Civil
17 Rights, students with disabilities make up 12 percent
18 of overall K-12 student enrollment but 28 percent of
19 referrals to law enforcement.

20 Autism Speaks believes that as long as these
21 interactions are taking place, it is critical for the
22 safety of both the students and the officers that

1 members of law enforcement have specialized training in
2 working with students with intellectual and
3 developmental disabilities.

4 We encourage the Department of Education to
5 invest in initiatives that are designed to prevent
6 unwarranted student involvement with law enforcement
7 and to provide autism-specific training for law
8 enforcement personnel.

9 Autism Speaks has facilitated successful
10 collaboration between police and families locally and
11 we are eager to assist you.

12 In 2016, DOJ's community relations service
13 produced a developmental disability awareness training
14 curriculum for law enforcement agencies. We encourage
15 the department to publish and share that training
16 curriculum as soon as possible.

17 Our third recommendation relates to inclusive
18 emergency preparedness. Emergency preparedness is very
19 important and it is absolutely critical that school
20 safety plans include provisions for protecting students
21 with disabilities.

22 Autism Speaks recognizes that students with

1 disabilities have a right to be safe at school.
2 Students with disabilities receive accommodations in
3 their daily lives and need accommodations in crisis
4 situations as well. Schools must develop safety and
5 evacuation plans that recognize and account for the
6 exceptionalities of students with disabilities.

7 Autism Speaks urges the agencies represented
8 on the commission, especially the Department of
9 Education, to invest in initiatives to support
10 inclusive school safety plans, such as training for
11 school personnel and first responders, onsite emergency
12 practice for students with disabilities and increasing
13 family awareness that individualized planning and
14 supports may be needed. At the very least, the
15 departments should identify and disseminate best
16 practices.

17 In conclusion, Autism Speaks recommends that
18 this commission address school safety through a
19 spectrum of supports, including but not limited to
20 wandering prevention and management, law enforcement
21 training and inclusive emergency preparedness. We
22 thank you for the opportunity to speak today and stand

1 ready to assist you in your efforts.

2 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Devon.

3 MR. DEVON: Thank you.

4 MR. TALBERT: So in accord with our plan for
5 the day, the hour of 2:45 having arrived, we'll take a
6 15-minute break. And at 3 o'clock, we'll reconvene.

7 (Whereupon, the foregoing went off the
8 record.)

9 DR. ZAIS: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, we're
10 about to get started. If you could have a seat, we
11 will reconvene.

12 MR. TALBERT: Our next -- sorry. Our next
13 presenter is Jaime Koppel. She's with the Communities
14 for Just Schools Fund -- I'm sorry, Communities for
15 Just Schools Fund.

16 MS. KOPPEL: It is that confusing. Good
17 afternoon. My name is Jaime Koppel and I am the deputy
18 director for strategic partnerships at the Communities
19 for Just Schools Fund. We're a national donor
20 collaborative that resources community organizations
21 working to ensure positive and supportive school
22 climates that affirm and foster the success of all

1 students.

2 CJSF makes grants to organizers, young people,
3 parents and caregivers and educators who are working to
4 end the overuse of exclusionary school discipline
5 practices and replace them with positive supports.

6 CJSF exists because there are far too many
7 students who are not safe in schools. They are not
8 safe because they are policed and targeted for
9 exclusion via flawed policies and practices and flawed
10 perceptions of them in their communities.

11 CJSF's 50 grantee partners' efforts span 31
12 states and have positively impacted millions of
13 students, families and educators.

14 When we received notice of this hearing last
15 Friday evening, we reached out to our network to ensure
16 that our partners, who in most instances do their work
17 on less than a shoestring, could be resourced to be in
18 this room today. You heard from many of them this
19 morning, Amina, Marlyn, Zakiya and Hashim. And my
20 remarks have echoes of their comments today.

21 I'm here also as a former U.S. Department of
22 Justice senior fellow. I worked on the supportive

1 school discipline initiative in the years 2014 and '15.
2 In those years, we worked hard to disentangle education
3 from systems that had become release valves for
4 overtaxed, under-resourced schools.

5 There is no need to reinvent the wheel in this
6 moment. The federal government has a wealth of
7 knowledge at its fingertips when it comes to what it
8 takes to ensure all schools are resourced and supported
9 and nurturing the academic and social-emotional genius
10 of all students and ensuring their safety.

11 Most personally, I am here as a mother, a
12 mother of two Montgomery County, Maryland public school
13 students. And I have experienced firsthand just how
14 hard it is for schools to get social-emotional learning
15 right, especially in the current environment which so
16 often privileges academic outcomes as a primary
17 objective.

18 I've seen parents, students and teachers
19 default to reliance on retributive justice to address
20 conflict and harm because it is what we all know and
21 are comfortable with.

22 On the other hand, I have seen the

1 transformational power of restorative practices and for
2 restoring relationships and allowing high quality
3 learning. Now is the time to acknowledge the
4 importance of ensuring students are seen, heard and
5 loved. This may sound soft, but it has been proven to
6 be the hardest work we need to do.

7 I want to highlight quickly a concern I have
8 with one of the issue areas the president has requested
9 this commission examine and then I'll offer quickly
10 some recommendations squarely rooted in my own
11 diversity of experience.

12 I'm concerned that the language repealing the
13 Obama administration's rethink school discipline
14 policies language as a stated issue for a commission
15 purportedly focused on school safety is a narrowly
16 framed and politically couched objective that has no
17 place in this commission's work.

18 If the objective is to ensure that the 2014
19 federal school discipline guidance package in no way
20 contributes to the creation of unsafe schools, that
21 should be the stated purpose.

22 But to be clear, that guidance package

1 included no such policies. It included no policies.
2 It provided guidance on relevant laws and offered
3 states and local school districts a menu of resources
4 they could consult in making their own decisions about
5 policy and practice changes that would end disparities
6 in discipline and ensure a safe and supportive school
7 experience for all students.

8 My recommendations, in order to get to the
9 culture of connectedness we desire, we need to consider
10 how systems and adults are perpetuating deeply embedded
11 racist practices that harm students of color and their
12 peers, including LGBTQ students and gender
13 nonconforming students, failing to ensure not only
14 their physical safety, but their emotional safety.

15 We need to create schools as spaces for
16 students, families and staff to build meaningful
17 relationships if schools are truly to be safe and
18 supportive environments that nurture academic and
19 social-emotional learning.

20 Arming teachers or school resource officers or
21 increasing the number of SROs in schools is a costly
22 approach in every way. And the expense will be borne

1 by those who are already most at risk.

2 My primary recommendation to you is to ensure
3 you're modeling the need to listen and respond to what
4 communities want and need in their schools. The groups
5 that CJSF supports, as exemplified by what you heard
6 this morning, have a vision for what safe, supportive
7 and nurturing schools look and feel like.

8 I want to leave you with an aligned example
9 from another one of our partners, Californians for
10 Justice, a statewide youth organizing group in
11 California that has developed and disseminated a plan
12 for implementing research -- relationship-centered
13 schools.

14 Their research revealed that one out of three
15 students in California cannot identify a single caring
16 adult at school. And they found relationships between
17 student and staff were the key to student success.

18 In conclusion, they have recommendations that
19 call on policymakers, education leaders and school
20 staff to join them in creating relationship-centered
21 schools. And that means we do not need to invest
22 further resources in hardening schools. We need to do

1 the harder work of building relationships and creating
2 learning environments where students can learn. Thank
3 you.

4 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Koppel.

5 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Jim
6 Accomando, from the National PTA.

7 MR. ACCOMANDO: Good afternoon. My name is
8 Jim Accomando, and I'm the president of the National
9 PTA. Thank you for the opportunity to provide remarks
10 today to the Federal School Safety Commission.

11 I'm here today to represent the almost 4
12 million PTA members across all 50 states, D.C., Virgin
13 Islands, Puerto Rico and Europe and, as such, I urge
14 the commission to please ensure its presence at future
15 listening sessions and that they are held at times and
16 locations that are conducive to hearing from more
17 parents, students and teachers.

18 Our mission is to make every child's potential
19 a reality by engaging in empowering families and
20 communities to advocate for all children. We speak for
21 every child, one voice.

22 National PTA joins students, families,

1 educators, school administrators, community leaders and
2 the nation in grief over all acts of violence,
3 including gun violence involving children and youth.
4 Grief and thoughts and prayers are not enough. Enough
5 is enough is not enough. Immediate action from our
6 nation's leaders is what is needed most right now.

7 This year, our country has experienced 14
8 school shootings that have resulted in injuries or
9 deaths. Parents should never fear sending their
10 children to school and students should always feel safe
11 in their learning environments. It is imperative that
12 we work together quickly to find solutions and make
13 meaningful changes to keep our children safe.

14 School safety is a critical priority for all
15 parents, educators, students and community members that
16 cannot be taken for granted. We must make every
17 attempt to reduce violence, especially incidents that
18 involve firearms and ensure every child can learn in an
19 environment that is safe.

20 National PTA urges meaningful parent and
21 family engagement in the development and implementation
22 of all school safety policies and programs such as

1 emergency and crisis response plans, discipline
2 policies and the access to school-based and community
3 support services.

4 Obviously we believe the most effective day-
5 to-day school climate is one that is gun-free. But we
6 defer to local collaborative decision-making that
7 engages parents and families to allow for the presence
8 of law enforcement deployed in community-oriented
9 policing.

10 Our association has a strong history of
11 advocating for laws and regulations in the areas of
12 school safety to include mental health, gun safety and
13 violence prevention and supports the following policy
14 recommendations. Many of these position statements and
15 resolutions go back to the early '90s, with continuous
16 updates and amendments.

17 They include requiring universal background
18 checks in the license to purchase a firearm. Reenact
19 the federal ban on the sale and possession of military-
20 style assault weapons. Lift any ban on research that
21 studies the causes and effects of gun violence.

22 Furthermore, we also advocate for preventative

1 measures to educate students, educators and community
2 members on firearm safety and violence prevention such
3 as inclusion of violence prevention and intervention
4 strategies in public schools and community programs and
5 services.

6 Promotion of public education campaigns to
7 alert parents and community members to the devastating
8 effects of firearms and firearm-related violence.

9 At the same time, National PTA urges federal,
10 state and local policymakers to prioritize mental
11 health education, early intervention, prevention and
12 access to school- and community-based mental health
13 personnel and services so that all children can reach
14 their fullest potential.

15 National PTA has long been committed to
16 providing improved mental health programs and services
17 to children, youth and their families and believe that
18 all children and youth have the right to mental health
19 treatment.

20 National PTA recommends federal, state and
21 local policies prioritize outreach and education,
22 including professional development for all school-based

1 employees in schools and communities regarding
2 childhood mental health, resources that are
3 specifically provided to build mental health and
4 behavioral health system capacity within schools and
5 communities to ensure students can receive a proactive
6 continuum of behavior in mental health services.

7 States and school districts provide the
8 necessary resources to ensure adequate ratios of school
9 counselors, school psychologists, school social workers
10 and school nurses who are the most qualified
11 professionals to provide school-based mental health
12 services.

13 The time for additional studies or
14 deliberation has long since passed. A framework for
15 safe and successful schools, written and endorsed by
16 our nation's leading education stakeholders and
17 practitioners, already has the best practices and
18 policy recommendations for school safety that this
19 commission can promote.

20 Our patience has run out. Immediate action to
21 make schools safer is required. Parents, students and
22 families demand it. Thank you again for this

1 opportunity to speak before the commission.

2 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Accomando.

3 MS. MILLER: Next, we'll hear from Jeff
4 Simering, from the Council of Great City Schools.

5 MR. SIMERING: Good afternoon. I'm Jeff
6 Simering, the director of legislative services from the
7 Council of the Great City Schools, the coalition of the
8 nation's largest central city-based school districts.

9 I am here today to provide the perspective of
10 our board of directors, comprised of the superintendent
11 and a board member from each of the 70 great city
12 school districts.

13 Repeating school shootings continue to shock
14 our conscience. The great city schools is similarly
15 alarmed by the prevalence of gun violence in too many
16 of our urban neighborhood.

17 The council shares the frustration voiced by
18 parents and students from affected schools who point to
19 the typical governmental response to school shootings
20 that is mainly talk and very little action,
21 particularly at the federal level.

22 We urge the commission to accelerate your

1 findings and reporting, which otherwise may serve to
2 delay any concrete federal action into the next federal
3 fiscal year or even beyond. School safety is obviously
4 a multidimensional issue and requires a multifaceted
5 set of actions.

6 As outlined in our 2018 board of directors
7 resolution, the council calls for comprehensive action
8 from the federal government to protect schoolchildren.

9 The council's resolution calls for new funds
10 to assist districts to update emergency and crisis
11 response plans, coordinate with various local
12 government agencies, make building alterations and
13 require security-related systems and equipment,
14 implement violence prevention, educating training in
15 trauma, programs and supports as well as providing new
16 funds to increase the number of school counselors,
17 mental health staff and safety personnel.

18 Additionally, the council board of directors
19 expects more than just increased funding. The council
20 calls for the federal government to strengthen criminal
21 background checks and reporting systems, to ban the
22 sale to the general public of assault weapons, large

1 capacity ammunition cartridges, gun modification
2 devices, expand and update the gun-free schools zone
3 laws and expand research and data collection on the
4 extent of gun violence, its causes and effective
5 prevention and intervention strategies. And the
6 council does not support arming teachers.

7 We also have a few additional actions that the
8 Department of Education might take that could
9 immediately begin to help school districts address
10 safety and security issues. The department should
11 withdraw its request to zero out the funding of Title
12 IV(a), which can be used for school safety initiatives
13 as well as mental health services.

14 Additionally, the department should clarify
15 that the full flexibility that is available under the
16 Every Student Succeeds Act, including the
17 transferability provisions and the ed flex provisions
18 will not be constrained by expansive department
19 interpretations and actually could be encouraged
20 amongst additional state departments of education and
21 school districts.

22 Unfortunately, school-based decisions that

1 might otherwise concentrate funding on either school
2 safety or support services or professional development
3 or, for that matter, academic services and strategies
4 to close achievement gaps can often be discouraged for
5 the fear of an after-the-fact federal interpretation,
6 disapproval or audit exception. And a clear statement
7 of department policy on these issues could really help
8 school districts meet their particular needs.

9 Finally, the council would again underscore
10 the sense of urgency for significant federal action in
11 school safety. The council requests that the
12 commission study all available federal actions and
13 options that would improve the safety of our nation's
14 school children.

15 To limit the scope of your inquiry I think
16 would undermine the final work product of the
17 commission. The nation's great city schools stands
18 ready to assist the commission as it undertakes this
19 complex task. And please ask any of our members for
20 any assistance that you all might need.

21 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Mr. Simering.

22 MS. MILLER: Next, we will hear from Noelia

1 Rivera-Calderon, from School Discipline Advocacy
2 Service.

3 MS. RIVERA-CALDERON: Good afternoon, and
4 thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name
5 is Noelia Rivera-Calderon. I'm the program director of
6 the School Discipline Advocacy Service, an organization
7 that directly advocates for students in school
8 disciplinary proceedings in Philadelphia.

9 Before this, I was in the trenches as a middle
10 school teacher in a Philadelphia public school. I'm
11 here today to urge this commission to recognize that
12 existing guidance from the Departments of Education and
13 Justice are essential tools in efforts to ensure our
14 children learn in a safe and supportive environment.

15 School safety is not a new concern. And as a
16 nation, we have chosen to address it by increasing law
17 enforcement presence in schools. This sounded like a
18 good idea. But too often, these law enforcement
19 officers, rather than protecting from gunmen or
20 intruders, turn their efforts against the very students
21 they are meant to protect.

22 A generation ago, adults remember detentions

1 and suspensions as among the most common and most
2 severe punishments for school-based misbehavior.

3 Today, almost half of children in the United
4 States attend schools with sworn law enforcement
5 officers who may and do arrest children for the same
6 offenses that in the past would have merited these
7 detentions.

8 Close to 2 million children in the United
9 States attend a school with a law enforcement officer,
10 but no guidance counselor. Over 10,000 children across
11 the country are arrested each year for some form of the
12 vague disturbing school. The use of suspensions has
13 already increased dramatically.

14 A disproportionate number of these students
15 both arrested and suspended are children of color,
16 LGBTQ students and students with disabilities. Is this
17 what we wanted when we dreamed of safe schools for our
18 children?

19 The components of the current rethinking
20 discipline guidance are essential tools for schools
21 seeking to promote safe and supportive learning
22 environments. They provide guidance on ending racial

1 discrimination in discipline, on ending the
2 traumatizing and sometimes even deadly use of seclusion
3 and restraints in schools and on ending the use of
4 corporal punishment in schools.

5 The guidance recognizes that even beyond
6 suspensions and school-based arrests often being
7 discriminatory, they just don't work. It recognizes
8 that SROs should not be tasked with enforcing school
9 discipline, a task that should be left to school
10 administrators and teachers.

11 It recommends supports for students with
12 disabilities. We shouldn't think twice about
13 maintaining and supporting this guidance. It provides
14 commonsense tools that help schools and students stay
15 safe.

16 Working as an advocate in the School
17 Discipline Advocacy Service, I defended a young black
18 high school girl who, for simply wanting to speak to
19 her mother who the principal called on her cellphone,
20 was arrested. At 14 years old, in school, she was put
21 in handcuffs and taken to the police station, where she
22 sat for hours and now has a criminal record.

1 That is an experience that can never be taken
2 back. It is a tragedy that is being repeated in
3 classrooms all across America today. We have a lot of
4 work to do to promote effective, fair school discipline
5 and the current guidance is one essential step in doing
6 so.

7 As a former middle school teacher, I know
8 better than anyone how difficult maintaining school
9 discipline and school safety can be. I don't think
10 anyone believes that school discipline should be
11 nonexistent. But it needs to be effective and fair.

12 I ask that this commission continue to support
13 safe, effective school discipline by maintaining
14 current guidance that keeps discipline in the hands of
15 school administrators and teachers rather than law
16 enforcement and protects the right of all children to
17 learn. Thank you.

18 DR. ZAIS: Thank you, Ms. Calderon.

19 MS. MILLER: I'm going to read out a list of
20 eight names of people who registered, but who we
21 haven't heard from yet today.

22 If you are one of these people, let us know.

1 Michael Dickson, Susan Kelly, Erica Lee, Simone Mason,
2 Safiyyah Muhammad, Nancy Ramirez, Teri Ward or Lisa
3 Watson. Are any of those people in the room? Then, we
4 have heard from everybody, sir.

5 DR. ZAIS: I'd like to thank everyone for
6 attending today, for your valuable input and for
7 obviously the care that you demonstrated in the
8 preparation of your remarks. Thank you for your input
9 and your contributions.

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11 (Whereupon, at 3:55 p.m., the meeting was
12 concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, SAMUEL HONIG, the officer before whom the foregoing proceeding was taken, do hereby certify that the proceedings were recorded by me and thereafter reduced to typewriting under my direction; that said proceedings are a true and accurate record to the best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of any counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.



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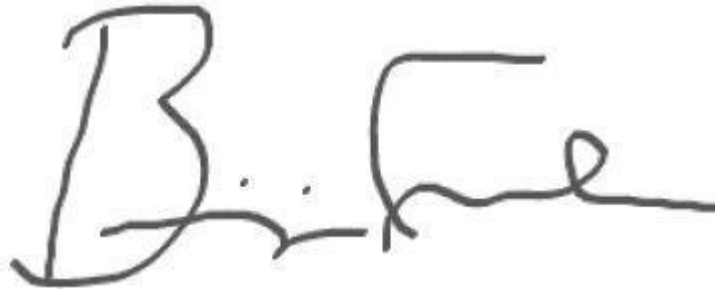
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CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

I, BENJAMIN GRAHAM, do hereby certify that this transcript was prepared from audio to the best of my ability.

I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Graham", is written over the printed name "Benjamin Graham". The signature is fluid and cursive.

June 11, 2018

DATE

Benjamin Graham

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