

Judiciary Subcommittee Holds Hearing on the School Safety Enhancements Act

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Congressman Rothman Testifies before Judiciary Subcommittee about the School Safety Enhancements Act

Legislation would expand Rothman's successful Secure Our Schools program.

Pictured: Rothman testifies before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. Also testifying today were, pictured left to right, Reps. Rahm Emanuel (D-IL), Rep. Joe Sestak (D-PA), and Ron Klein (D-FL).

(Washington, DC)-Today, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) testified before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security in favor of the School Safety Enhancements Act (H.R. 2352). This legislation would expand Rothman's successful Secure Our Schools program, passed into law in 2000, which is a federal matching grant project to help local governments afford security equipment and training in their schools.

"Schools should be a place where our young people feel safe and can learn. Instead of constantly looking over their shoulders in fear of gangs or guns, they deserve an environment that allows them to focus on studies and building life-long friendships. I am proud to report that Secure Our Schools has already helped an estimated 2,400 schools in 50 states and territories improve the safety of students. However, I believe we can and must do more. That's why my colleagues in the Senate and I introduced the School Safety Enhancements Act," said Rothman.

The Congressman went on to describe how the School Safety Enhancements Act would enable more schools to receive Secure Our Schools grants. Specifically, H.R. 2352 makes the program more affordable to schools by increasing the federal share of elementary and secondary school security upgrades to 80% and lowering the local responsibility to 20%. It also increases federal funding authorized for these grants to \$50 million from \$30 million.

In addition to those improvements, H.R. 2353 expands the list of uses for these grants to include the creation of a safety hotline. Students and others can call this telephone line to report dangerous situations. Currently, no safety measure that a school requests is made off-limits by the program, but Senator Ken Salazar advocated for listing hotlines after having seen first-hand how effective they can be during his tenure as Colorado State Attorney General.

"One of the best aspects of the Secure Our Schools program is the flexibility that it offers local school districts and law enforcements agencies to determine for themselves how best to protect their students," explains Rothman. "Secure Our Schools is a completely voluntary grant program that cash-strapped municipalities can use to afford school safety improvements that they determine are necessary. Schools have used this funding for metal detectors, locks, lighting, cameras, and training of security personnel. I am hopeful that with the passage of this bill, even more schools will be able to receive these vital grants."

On top of grant funding, H.R. 2353 addresses safety on college campuses, which was a clear priority for Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and others who worked on the bill in the wake of last year's tragic shooting at Virginia Tech. Specifically, the legislation requires all institutions of higher education to assess campus safety on an annual basis and develop an emergency response plan to prepare for emergency situations, including natural disasters, active shooter situations, and terrorist attacks. The specifics of those plans and safety assessments are left to the discretion of colleges and universities.

The School Security Enhancements Act has 53 co-sponsors in the House and was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Ken Salazar (D-CO), Charles Schumer (D-NY), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Richard Durbin (D-IL), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH).

Rothman is a former member of the House Judiciary Committee. He currently sits on the House Appropriations Committee, which makes decisions about all federal spending, and the House Committee on Science and Technology.

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