

February 13, 2023

Oregon Federation of Independent Schools
19800 Oatfield Road
Gladstone, OR 97027

House Committee on Education
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair Wright, and members of the Committee:

As the volunteer director of the Oregon Federation of Independent Schools, I can tell you that Oregon private schools are very concerned about the safety and security of all school children, faculty, staff and volunteers. We do everything we can to keep our schools and communities safe. We understand the well-meaning motivation to those who support HB 3101 and we share their concerns for school safety.

We oppose HB 3101 for the following reasons.

- 1) School security is not a one-size-fits-all problem and different schools may have different priorities. Panic alarms may not be every schools' security priority.

Public and private schools should have the ability to control their own health and safety budgets. While a panic alarm may be the right use of one school's budget, another school may have determined a higher priority in other purchases or programs - from video cameras to vitally-needed training.

- 2) In this economic climate, the costs of installing such a system is a big issue and the related time and energy is a big issue

There is no provision for funding the installation of panic alarms generally and particularly for private schools. Small and rural schools may experience major expenses to install such a system that exceed their current budgets for security and safety expenses. That could also keep them from addressing other security concerns they consider higher priority. For private schools this is an unfunded mandate.

- 3) The effectiveness and usefulness of school panic alarms is not universally agreed upon. A quick search on the topic of school panic alarm effectiveness discloses concerns by school security experts who question their purchase and use.

For example, the New York Post reported last August:

Ken Trump, president of the National School Safety and Security Services, dismissed these systems as nothing more than "security theater." Rather than expensive measures, he suggests training staff to make sure doors are not open, and to implement basic safety protocols."

People want visible, tangible things," Trump told The Associated Press. "It's a lot harder to point to the value of training your staff. Those are intangibles. Those are things that are less visible and invisible, but they're most effective."

...National Association of School Resource Officers executive director Mo Canady is firmly against panic buttons, cautioning that they can lead to false alarms or pranks, without yielding positive results.

"In throwing so much technology at the problem," Canaday told the AP, "we may have unintentionally created a false sense of security."

<https://nypost.com/2022/08/22/schools-introduce-panic-buttons-for-shootings-but-safety-chief-calls-it-security-theater/>

Other critics discuss the fact that first responders don't know the nature of the emergency or crisis and can't arrive prepared and ready to address an unknown situation.

Aren't cell phones a better option than panic buttons? Faculty, staff and many older students have cell phones and could easily call 911. They provide two-way communication and communicate much more than just a one-way alarm.

We welcome discussions about school safety and are happy to be participants in the education community. School security is of shared high concern. We suggest it might make sense to look beyond HB 3101 and address the issue of school safety more broadly than one bill that mandates one action. Perhaps the Committee could convene a study group to find needs and gaps, as well as best practices that could be addressed.

We appreciate the serious work before the Committee and we ask for further discussion and research on the issue of mandatory school panic alarms and the broader topic of school safety. Meanwhile, the Committee should not pass HB 3101.

Sincerely,

Mark Siegel
Executive Director
Oregon Federation of Independent Schools