

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Requiring Age-Appropriate School Security Drills

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**TRENTON** – Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation (A-5727/S-3726) which requires school security drills to be age-appropriate and to prevent unnecessary traumatization of schoolchildren. Among other requirements, the legislation prohibits the use of fake blood, real or prop firearms, or the simulations of gun shots or explosions in school security drills. The legislation, which Governor Murphy announced his support for last April, will strike an appropriate balance between ensuring that students are informed and ready for threats that schools face in the present day, while being sensitive to the mental health needs of schoolchildren.

“Unfortunately, school security drills are a reality of the environment that our students are living in,” said **Governor Murphy**. “These necessary exercises are proven to save lives but may also traumatize young children if not conducted in an appropriate manner. This legislation will ensure that school security drills provide students with the information and preparedness that they need to stay safe in emergency situations, while also taking steps to prevent drills from having a harmful impact on the mental health of our schoolchildren.”

“This measure strikes a balance that will continue to ensure students and staff in our schools remain safe and prepared to respond to emergencies, while also aiming to prevent drills from causing undue confusion or alarm,” said **Acting Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen McMillan**. “We have always maintained the need for schools to provide a balanced, age-appropriate approach to school safety – a point that we have stressed in the numerous training programs and drill observations the Department has conducted, and continues to conduct.”

“I applaud Governor Murphy and our legislators for their continued dedication to the security of communities, and most importantly, to our children in schools,” said **Acting Director of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Laurie Doran**. “As threats continue to evolve, so does the need for our tactics. This bill helps ensure our school security efforts embrace students and families in a way that cultivates a culture of preparedness through continual improvement. Working with our State and local partners, NJOHSP will continue to prioritize the safety and security of schools by providing training, assessments, outreach and other resources to ensure the collective resilience of our school communities.”

Primary sponsors of this legislation include Assemblymembers Pamela Lampitt, Louis Greenwald, and Ralph Caputo, and Senators Loretta Weinberg, and Shirley Turner.

“While it is important to prepare our students for worst-case scenarios, it is just as important to ensure that security drills do not expose them to unnecessary trauma,” said **Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt**. “Studies show that active shooter drills can cause increases in depression, stress, anxiety and physiological health problems. Our schools must be a place where students feel safe and ready to learn, but security drills that result in student trauma have the opposite effect.”

“Security drills do not have to mimic many students’ biggest fear in order to be effective,” said **Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald**. “We can make sure our students know what to do during real security events by providing them with proper resources and using less-intense security drills instead of relying on damaging scare tactics.”

“Being a student is stressful enough without the looming threat of school shootings,” said **Assemblyman Ralph Caputo**. “Adding to that with deceptively realistic active-shooter drills and other intense lockdown drills is a disservice to New Jersey’s students. With this law, we can protect our students from unnecessary trauma.”

“When it comes to so-called ‘active-shooter’ drills in our schools, we need to make sure we are consistent in our messaging, so as to make sure students know the difference between a drill and a real-time event,” said **Senator Loretta Weinberg**. “Our students have enough stress in their lives without adding one more layer of trauma. While we need to prepare our students for the worst, we also need also to continue to address the gun issue directly – especially in regard to ease of accessing firearms and the mental health issues that so often play an underlying role in the nation’s rising epidemic of gun violence.”

“Training students and staff to respond in emergency situations will help save lives, but safety drills that are conducted without warning can add to the fear, stress, and anxiety that students and teachers have about gun situations and other crises in their schools,” said **Senator Shirley K. Turner**. “Students and teachers can be prepared and feel safe without making safety drills into traumatic experiences.”

A-5727/S-3726 requires the following guidance and procedures for school districts conducting school security drills when students are present:

- Drills will include clear, developmentally and age-appropriate messaging to students and staff at the conclusion of the drill that the event is a drill and no current danger exists;
- Drills cannot include the use of fake blood, real or prop firearms, or the simulations of gun shots, explosions, or other sounds or visuals that may induce panic or a traumatic response from a student or school district employee;
- Drills must be accessible to students with disabilities and mental health conditions, and provides all necessary accommodations for these students;
- School districts shall provide written notification to the parent or guardian of a student enrolled in the district following completion of a school security drill, which notice shall be provided to the parent or guardian by no later than the end of the school day on which the school security drill is conducted;
- School districts may permit emergency personnel access to the buildings and grounds of its schools for school security drills that are scheduled outside of school hours and during such times as students are not present;
- District shall review and update their school security drill procedures using a process that coincides with the review of the school safety and security plan developed pursuant to N.J.A.C.6A:16-5.1 and collects input from emergency personnel, parents and guardians of students enrolled in the district, teachers and staff employed in the district, mental health professionals, and student government representatives from multiple grade levels;

Security Drill

- School districts will annually track data on such measures and information as are required by the Commissioner of Education, and shall report the data to the commissioner.

"We have to keep our students safe, and that includes protecting their mental and emotional health," **said NJEA President Sean M. Spiller.** "We applaud Gov. Murphy and the Legislature for taking this step to ensure that the safety drills intended to protect students from physical harm are also designed to protect them from unnecessary fear and trauma."

"This is a historic day. Thanks to Gov. Murphy's and the New Jersey Legislature's leadership and foresight, New Jersey is now the first state in the nation to begin addressing the trauma inflicted on our children by active shooter drills," **said Brady Board Chair Kevin Quinn.** "This is the result of hard work and advocacy from grassroots activists and expert counsel from clinical social worker and family therapist Nancy Kislin, who has studied and brought awareness to the harm that many active shooter drills cause to our children. Brady is grateful to Ms. Kislin for leading the way on this cause and to Gov. Murphy and the New Jersey Legislature for passing this bill that prioritizes the mental health and well-being of our children."

"We applaud Gov. Murphy for taking proactive steps to prioritize student mental health in preventing school shootings and violence in New Jersey," **said Mark Barden, CEO of the Sandy Hook Promise Action Fund and father of Daniel, who was killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy.** "We must do all we can to protect our children from the trauma of a school shooting, beginning with our safety drills."

Active Shooter Drills have forced millions of young people to become experts in survival but these drills have shown to be traumatizing as well harmful to the mental health of both students and staff," **said Jai B. Patel, March For Our Lives Movement Organizer.** "The work of the Murphy Administration and the gun violence prevention movement on A5727 reminds us that a student's most important lesson should not be how to survive. This is a start to end the generational trauma caused by lockdown drills in New Jersey."

"Once again, Governor Murphy continues to put the safety of our children first by signing this critical legislation," **said Amy Faucher, a volunteer with the New Jersey chapter of Moms Demand Action.** "This bill provides necessary, modernized reforms to the way our schools practice active shooter drills, to ensure that they are trauma-informed and age-appropriate for students. We are grateful to Governor Murphy for his leadership and we look forward to supporting further legislative action to reduce gun violence in New Jersey in the 2022 session."

## Governor Phil Murphy

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