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## Department of Justice Support for School Safety Initiatives

The February 14, 2018, shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, and the March 20, 2018, shooting at Great Mills High School in Great Mills, MD, has generated renewed interest in federal government efforts to support school safety. This In Focus provides an overview of Department of Justice (DOJ) programs for improving school safety, including grants for school resource officers (SROs) and physical security (e.g., metal detectors and cameras).

### Grant Programs for School Safety

DOJ has two grant programs—Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) hiring and the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) programs—that can help state, local, and tribal governments start school resource officer (SRO) programs. Congress also recently reauthorized the Secure Our Schools (SOS) program, which is to provide funding for physical security measures in schools. Finally, until recently, Congress has provided funding for school safety research through the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative.

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**What are “SROs”?** There is no universal definition of an SRO. The duties of SROs can vary from one community to the next. However, their activities can be placed into three general categories: (1) safety expert and law enforcer, (2) problem solver and liaison to community resources, and (3) educator. SROs can act as safety experts and law enforcers by assuming primary responsibility for handling calls for service from the school, making arrests, issuing citations on campus, taking actions against unauthorized persons on school property, and responding to off-campus criminal activities that involve students. They also serve as first responders in the event of critical incidents at the school. SROs can help solve problems that are not necessarily crimes (e.g., bullying or disorderly behavior) but that can contribute to a poor school climate and may lead to criminal incidents. Problem-solving activities conducted by SROs can include developing and expanding crime prevention efforts and community justice initiatives for the school and its students. SROs can also present courses on topics related to policing or responsible citizenship for students, faculty, and parents.

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### SRO-Related Grants

The COPS hiring program provides grants to state, local, and tribal governments with primary law enforcement responsibilities to hire new or former law enforcement

officers for entry-level positions (see also CRS Report RL33308, *Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS): In Brief*). COPS hiring grants can be used to hire officers to serve as SROs. Applicants who want to hire SROs are required to submit a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the law enforcement agency and the partner school that outlines the program’s purpose, partner roles and responsibilities, requirements for information sharing, and how an SRO will be supervised. The COPS Office also requires SROs hired with grant funds to attend a regional training program. COPS hiring grants can cover up to 75% of the salaries and fringe benefits of full-time entry-level officers for a three-year grant period. Hiring grants do not cover more than \$125,000 in salary and benefits per officer over the three-year grant period.

The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program is a formula grant that provides funding to state, local, and tribal governments for a variety of state and local criminal justice initiatives (see also). Grant recipients can use their JAG funds for technical assistance, training, personnel, equipment, supplies, contractual support, and criminal justice information systems for, among other things, law enforcement programs.

JAG’s broad program purpose areas are intended to give states and local units of government flexibility in creating programs to address local needs. As such, grant recipients could use their funding for school safety initiatives, but they are not required to do so. According to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), states can subaward JAG funds to public or private schools as long as the intended program falls within one of the eight JAG program areas. Because JAG funds can be used for personnel related to law enforcement programs it appears likely that grantees could use their funding to hire SROs. According to the Office of Justice Programs, state and local governments can also subaward JAG funds to schools for physical security measures as long as there is a criminal justice nexus and the program falls within one of JAG’s purpose areas.

### Security Measures in Schools

Congress recently reauthorized the SOS program through the STOP School Violence Act of 2018 (Title V, Division S, P.L. 115-141). Under this program, grants can be awarded to state, local, and tribal governments for evidence-based programs to improve security at schools and on school grounds. Specifically, grants can be used for

- training school personnel and students to prevent student violence against others and self;
- developing and operating anonymous reporting systems for threats of school violence, including mobile telephone applications, hotlines, and websites;

- developing and operating school threat assessment and intervention teams that may include coordination with law enforcement agencies and school personnel and specialized training for school officials in responding to mental health crises;
- coordination with local law enforcement;
- training for local law enforcement officers to prevent student violence against others and self;
- placement and use of metal detectors, locks, lighting, and other deterrent measures;
- acquisition and installation of technology for expedited notification of local law enforcement during an emergency; and
- any other measure that, in the determination of the BJA or the COPS Office, may provide a significant improvement in training, threat assessments and reporting, violence prevention, and security.

State, local, and tribal governments can use grant funds awarded for the purposes outlined above for contracts or subgrants to local educational agencies, nonprofit organizations, and units of local government or tribal organizations. Grantees under this program are required to provide a 25% match. Congress reauthorized the SOS program at \$75 million for FY2018 and \$100 million each fiscal year from FY2019 to FY2028. The STOP School Violence Act stated that funding appropriated for the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative (see below) for FY2018 shall be used for the SOS program.

### Funding for Research on School Safety

In the wake of the Newtown, CT, school shooting, Congress provided funding for a Comprehensive School Safety Initiative (CSSI). Congress provided funding for this initiative, which focuses on supporting research related to school safety, from FY2014 through FY2017. As noted above, FY2018 funding for CSSI is to be used for the SOS program. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) announced that it has cancelled the grant solicitation for funding under the CSSI for FY2018. Under this initiative, NIJ engaged in the following activities:

- Funding programs and research in local schools to develop and test innovative approaches to enhancing school safety.
- Developing and testing comprehensive school safety strategies through coordinated activities and evaluations with select school districts.

- Assessing technology designed to increase school safety.
- Enhancing data collection efforts related to school safety.
- Convening experts, including school professionals and researchers, to make research findings regarding school safety applicable to real world settings.
- Engaging in partnerships with other federal agencies to bring a multi-disciplinary approach to school safety (e.g., education, law enforcement, health and mental health, and criminal justice).

### Other DOJ Resources on School Safety

In addition to grant programs to support school safety initiatives, DOJ has compiled resources that could be helpful to policymakers who want to understand more about this issue, or school administrators and law enforcement professionals who want to explore ways to enhance the safety of their local schools.

For example, the COPS Office has a webpage that provides background information on SROs, including fact sheets on MOUs between schools and law enforcement agencies that provide SROs and SRO training.

- <https://cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=2687>

DOJ's Crime Solutions website provides information on evaluations of school safety programs and practices. Evaluations can be sorted by those DOJ has rated as effective, those that are "promising," and those that are ineffective.

- <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/TopicDetails.aspx?ID=314>

The National Criminal Justice Reference Service has a webpage that provides a directory of resources related to school safety. This webpage has Q&As on school safety topics, links to DOJ publications on school safety, and links to school safety resources.

- <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Topics/Topic.aspx?Topicid=153>

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