



“Uniting Schools and Communities to
Strengthen Future Generations for Emergencies and Disasters”

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**Testimony on the Center for School Youth and Citizen Preparedness and School Crisis
Preparedness Conferences**

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Special Committee on School Safety
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Thank you, Chairperson Lehman and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Mary Jean Erschen, and I serve as the Executive Director and Founder of the Center for School Youth and Citizen Preparedness, which I will refer to as the “Center” throughout my testimony. Joining me today is Peter Pochowski, retired Safety Director of Milwaukee Public Schools and currently serving as Executive Director for the National Association of School and Safety Law Enforcement Officers and President-elect for the Wisconsin School Safety Coordinator’s Association; and Doug Reynolds, retired School Security and Safety Coordinator from the School District of Beloit and currently serving as President and Founder of Safety Quest, Inc. Both gentlemen have served as a visible and accessible resource for Wisconsin schools as members of the Wisconsin School Crisis Preparedness Team, members of the speaker’s bureau for the Center, and providing school safety information and planning resources as a result of state conferences.

We are very pleased to have been invited to present testimony to you and to represent the many others who have been involved in the activities of the Center, which currently includes 78 volunteers across the State of Wisconsin.

History:

The overview handout provided with your meeting material contains information about the Center and progression throughout the years since 1999. The progression of the work completed by the Center has been organized under various public and private organizations including the Department of Health and Family Services, the University of La Crosse, and another non-profit organization, the Wisconsin Technical College System Foundation. We were recently granted 501 c 3 public charity status by the Internal Revenue Service in July of 2008. This organizational structure was developed with encouragement of the Office of Justice Assistance with the rationale of reducing overhead costs and creating sustainability by having the ability to accept not only state and federal grant funds, but also foundation grants, private donations, gifts, and in-kind support from corporations and individual donors.

The Center leadership is composed of a volunteer Board of Directors and two committees which meet monthly to develop, implement, and evaluate the different focus areas of the Center – school and youth preparedness. Volunteers dedicate their time and resources to support the work of the Center in a variety of ways. The focus areas of the Center are included in the priorities of the federal and Wisconsin strategies for the Homeland Security Program to train citizens to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency and disaster situations. Governor Doyle, Wisconsin Citizen Corps Council, Office of Justice Assistance, Homeland Security Program, Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Emergency Management, Department of Military Affairs, Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Safety, Department of Health Services, and Department of Juvenile Corrections have been supportive and active in our initiatives as well as leading experts in school preparedness, education,

emergency management, law enforcement, fire service, emergency medical services (EMS), injury prevention, trauma services, and crime prevention. We feel that this multidisciplinary approach has led to the success of the many initiatives that have been implemented statewide. The multidisciplinary approach to leadership at the state level also serves as a role model for communities, schools, and youth organizations to work together in leading school safety efforts at the local level.

Current funding includes state grant funds from the Office of Justice Assistance and Department of Transportation. In-kind support has been provided by the Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Emergency Management, Charter Communications, many organizations and individuals. The Center is also supported by financial donations from businesses and individuals.

School preparedness initiatives include:

- School Crisis Preparedness Conferences
- School Crisis Preparedness Administrator Conferences
- Safe Schools – Best Practice Monthly Webcast Series
- Emergency Preparedness Guidelines for Schools
- Safe Schools Week Proclamation, Poster, Activities, and Resources
- Website with links, documents, funding information and resources to assist schools with preparedness
- License for electronic school crisis plan templates and instructional material for all Wisconsin K-12 schools, technical colleges and universities from Safe Havens International through a memorandum of understanding by the Office of Justice Assistance, Wisconsin Technical College System Foundation, and the Center
- Technical Assistance to schools in preparedness needs including grants, plans, education, exercises and drills
- Public speaking at statewide, regional, national and international conferences
- Collaboration with other School Safety Centers nationwide through the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools Program

Youth preparedness initiatives include:

- 5-day Responding to Emergencies And Disasters with Youth (READY) summer camps
- 3-day READY Classes for middle school students
- 2-day READY Classes for high school students
- Ribbon of Promise Campaign to create a positive school culture and prevent school violence

Specific conference information requested:

- Staff costs are currently partially funded by the Office of Justice Assistance and will be funded through December 2009.
- Conference costs are funded by a registration fee of \$70/person or \$50/person if schools or community emergency responders bring 5 or more persons. This team concept has been promoted by the planning team to encourage schools to develop systems to implement information learned during the conference.
- Attendance includes school administrators, school board members, members of the school crisis response team, and their local emergency responders including law enforcement, fire, EMS, and emergency management personnel. Participants have also included many private school, Native American school, and home school network participants. CESA representatives have regularly attended the conferences. Participants have also included representatives from technical colleges and universities, although the focus has been towards K-12 schools. Many schools attend the conference annually.
- A total cost per conference is approximately \$7,735 per 100 persons attending. Staffing, including 1 FTE salary, fringe benefits, and contracted fiscal support would cost approximately \$95,240.

- The number of persons who have attended the conference since implementation has been:
 - 2005 - 716 attendees with 5 conferences held – free of charge to participants
 - 2006 – total of 1,144 attendees with 9 conferences held – free of charge to participants. Attendance after the Weston School District shooting increased from an average of 100 participants to over 300 participants per conference.
 - 2007 – 572 attendees with 6 conferences held – fee structure implemented
 - 2008 – 434 attendees with 5 conferences held – fee structure continued
- Locations were selected by School Crisis Preparedness Committee to provide accessibility to participants across the state on a regional basis. Milwaukee, Madison, and Green Bay have been chosen due to the population base of schools and community emergency response organizations. The Wausau location has been chosen as a central area of the state, and Eau Claire has been chosen as a northern area. We have received a request to hold a conference in the far northern area of the state in 2009.
- Topics covered within the conferences are chosen by the School Crisis Preparedness Committee from suggestions provided within the evaluation summaries each year and current issues that are relevant to situations that occur within the State of Wisconsin. For the past two years, State Education Secretary Elizabeth Burmaster and staff from DPI have developed an introductory welcome that focuses on the need for preparedness including current statistics, recognizing the partnering organizations, and thanking schools for their commitment to creating a safe and secure learning environment. This year's tabletop exercise was developed by Wisconsin Emergency Management in response to the questions that were raised by the January tornadoes which affected Southeast Wisconsin schools since they hit during the end of the school day and students were already on buses. Many schools had questions related to what was the appropriate action to take. Topics have been focused on the National Incident Management System, Incident Command, and the four phases of emergency and crisis management including prevention, planning, response, and recovery. The theme of the conference changes each year to cover a different focus area.
- Implementation improvements have been made each year in response to evaluation summaries from participants. We started with a 2-day conference format and reduced to 1-day conferences at the suggestion of participants due to the lack of time available to leave their school to attend educational opportunities. This year, we added sessions to provide technical assistance in developing or improving their school crisis preparedness plan. Some schools had no plan or a minimal template of a school plan and needed direction from our team of experts in the field.

Questions asked by committee members at last month's meeting:

What are the unmet needs? Do we need to conduct an assessment?

- The need is evident for continuance of the conferences due to this year's conference evaluations. Many participants have asked to return to the 2-day format. Some of the schools are very well prepared and many schools continue to have no plan in place.
- An informal assessment of schools that have plans in place has been conducted at the conferences. It would be beneficial to complete a formal assessment of what each school district has in place what the needs of schools are related to preparedness.
- Our plan for 2009 includes the development and implementation of conferences for technical college systems and universities at their request. They have been attending our conferences, but the focus has been primarily towards K-12 schools and their needs are different since their student population consists of adults vs. children.

What would the cost be to develop a School Safety Resource Center?

- We would highly recommend the Committee to designate an official School Safety Resource Center even if there isn't adequate state funding to completely support it. There are meetings of the School Safety Resources Centers that have been developed in other states and without an official designation; they do not receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Safe and Drug Free Schools program.

- Costs would be dependent upon what aspects would be funded. The least expensive amount would be to cover staffing, fiscal support, and statewide travel costs. The Center could raise funds and in-kind support through partnerships for each initiative. The cost would be estimated at \$100,000 - \$150,000 annually.

How are other states organizing their School Safety Resource Centers?

- The most successful and most active Centers are either located within or supported by non-profit organizations. I am involved with the Colorado School Safety Resource Center and they receive support from the University of Colorado at Boulder and the Colorado Children's Trust Fund to implement their programs.
- As mentioned, there is no specific model. We have been highly encouraged to organize as a non-profit organization at the recommendation of the Office of Justice Assistance for cost effectiveness and sustainability.

How would relationships develop between DPI and CESA's?

- We are currently working with CESA's from across the state in collaboration with DPI. The CESA directors have coordinated educational presentations for school administrators at their CESA location.
- We have been presented many workshops for the CESA's at their request.

What resources currently exist for school preparedness?

- For 2008 Safe Schools Week, the Center, along with the members of the School Crisis Preparedness Committee has developed a list of statewide and national organizations that provide resources at either no cost or at very low cost. This was distributed to schools statewide prior to Governor Doyle's proclamation of the week of October 19-25 as Wisconsin Safe Schools Week. These resources can be found on our website at www.citizenpreparedness.org.
- We have partnered with other organizations and individuals to provide resources to schools at either no cost or at a low cost to the schools. One example is DPI's pandemic preparedness program. The consultant working with DPI has provided information for the participants of the conferences and will be working with the Center to provide resources and a tool kit to school districts at no charge.
- The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health has also offered to provide support through involvement of pediatric medical students, interns, residents, and physicians to implement preparedness initiatives.

What would be the benefit of designating the Center for School Youth and Citizen Preparedness as the Wisconsin School Safety Resource Center?

- The Center has had 9 years of experience in working with and developing relationships with Wisconsin public, private, Native American and home school districts and programs.
- Positive relationships have been developed with school districts. This is essential for implementation of any initiatives and takes years to develop trust and sustainability within school districts.
- A mechanism has been developed to organize as an efficient, cost effective, and sustainable model for development, implementation, and evaluation of school preparedness initiatives.
- Partnerships have been established and maintained with government agencies, universities, technical colleges, non-profit organizations, private businesses, and individuals to support schools and youth statewide.
- Administrative costs are kept to a minimum. We have the experience that if located within a technical college or university setting, the indirect costs are much higher.
- The initiatives that have been implemented by the Center have been extremely successful and have received recognition from Elizabeth Burmaster, State Education Superintendent, statewide organizations such as the Wisconsin School Safety Coordinators Association, Wisconsin School Public Relations Association, and Wisconsin American Academy of Pediatrics. National recognition has been provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Medical Services for Children Program.