



Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General Josh Shapiro

Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on
Behavioral Health and the Safe2Say Something Program

Provided by Mike Vereb, Director of Government Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Baker and Chairman Farnese, and all members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am Mike Vereb, Director of Government Affairs for the Office of Attorney General Josh Shapiro. Thank you for inviting me to speak today on behalf of Attorney General Shapiro about the Safe2Say Something Program and mental health.

SUMMARY OF SAFE2SAY SOMETHING AND MENTAL HEALTH

In 2018, Senators Browne and Hughes introduced Senate Bill 1142, which directed the Office of Attorney General to establish and administer the Safe2Say Something 24/7 anonymous school safety reporting program. Senate Bill 1142 was signed into law on June 22, 2018 as Act 44 of 2018 and the program went live and was receiving tips beginning January 14, 2019.

Safe2Say Something is a life-saving and life-changing school safety program that teaches students, educators, and administrators how to recognize the signs and signals of individuals who may be at risk of hurting themselves or others and how to anonymously report information through the Safe2Say Something app, website or 24/7 Crisis Center hotline.

From the launch of the program to July 1, in just six months, Safe2Say Something received 23,494 tips. Tips are broken down into two categories: life-safety, meaning the tip indicated lives were in imminent danger, and non-life-safety. Sadly, more than 4,000 tips have been designated as life-safety.

The top three categories of tips received are bullying/cyber bullying, cutting/self-harm, and suicide/suicide ideation. Of the 23,494 tips received, 3,558 have been bullying/cyber bullying; 2,529 have been related to cutting/self-harm; and 2,184 tips were categorized as suicide/suicide ideation. Following closely behind is depression/anxiety with 2,121 of tips reported being placed in that category. These four categories alone, directly related to mental health, amount to nearly half of all tips submitted by our Pennsylvania students to the Safe2Say Something program. This does not even consider additional tip categories such as substance use, threats against schools, and harassment, which often have a connection to mental health.

School safety reporting programs have been put in place following mass shootings as a way to combat violent threats to schools and students. What our data shows is that the tips received by the Safe2Say Something program focus on students struggling with mental health issues. The numbers I have discussed and that you will see in our annual report show the reality of what children across this Commonwealth are facing each and every day in school as they struggle with bullying, anxiety, and thoughts of self-harm.

Attorney General Shapiro urges the Pennsylvania General Assembly to fully examine our report, study the data, and act to address the need for increased mental health resources for students across Pennsylvania.

CONCLUSION

The Safe2Say Something 2018-2019 Annual Report is enclosed. Thank you Chairwoman Baker, Chairman Farnese, and all committee members for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.