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# Grant funding to enhance school safety in Alabama

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BY NICOLE SMITH

The Department of Justice announced Tuesday that more than \$70 million in grant funding will help improve safety at schools across the country, including the state of Alabama.

More than 220 awards will be presented to jurisdictions in the United States to enhance school security, including the State of Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) and the Alabama State Department of Education, according to a press release Tuesday.

The BJA (Bureau of Justice Assistance) STOP School Violence Threat Assessment and Technology Reporting Program will award \$369,633 to ALEA; the STOP School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training Program will award \$353,608 to the Alabama State Department of Education; and the COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) Office School Violence Prevention Program (SVPP) will award \$468,750 to ALEA.

The grants are being awarded as part of the STOP School Violence Act, which was signed into law early this year.

A press release from the Department of Justice said the funding will help to enhance school security, train and educate students and school faculty members and provide support for first responders and law enforcement officers.

"Earlier this year [President Donald Trump] signed into law the STOP School Violence Act, which provides grant funding to develop anonymous school threat reporting systems, to implement school building security measures and to train students, school personnel and law enforcement on how to prevent school violence," Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in the press release. "Today I am announcing \$70 million in these grants to hundreds of cities and states across America. These grants will go a long way toward giving young people and their families both safety and peace of mind."

Jasper City Schools Superintendent Dr. Ann Jackson said municipalities are responsible for applying to receive the grant funding, and she hopes some of the money will eventually trickle down to benefit both the county and city schools.

"We hope they apply, and we hope they receive it and that there will be some additional safety measures put in place at the schools as a result of the grant, but how they choose to use that is up to them," Jackson said.

Dr. Joel Hagood, interim superintendent for Walker County Schools, said he echos Jackson's sentiments.

"We're grateful for every little bit we could possibly get to help improve school safety," Hagood said.

Schools in Jasper are provided school resource officers, with help from the Jasper Police Department. Not all county schools are provided with school resource officers, however, due to some areas not having police departments in their jurisdictions.

"We're so much different than Jasper City, because we have schools in outlying areas — Lupton for example — that do not have a municipality. Fortunately, we've been able to work with the sheriff's department in providing a police presence there," Hagood said. "We hope to continue that and possibly expand that as funds become available in the future."

Municipalities across the state that do apply for and receive the grant funding could use it to further train officers on responding to active shooter situations, enhance technology reporting systems and address other safety needs.

Also announced Tuesday by the Department of Justice was \$64 million in grants to improve the country's overall criminal record systems, in terms of accessibility and quality. The grants will, in addition, upgrade records with the firearms background check system.



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