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## Ivey school safety report recommends more money for SROs; stays silent on armed teachers

**Brian Lyman**, Montgomery Advertiser Published 4:48 p.m. CT May 7, 2018



(Photo: Albert Cesare / Advertiser)

A commission on school safety last week recommended more funding for school security, better coordination with law enforcement and mandatory training.

But the council's 36-page report stayed silent on more controversial proposals to arm teachers or restrict firearms.

The Securing Alabama Facilities of Education (SAFE) Council, formed after the Feb. 14 shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, that killed 17 people, finished its report last week. The governor's office released it Monday.

The report recommends dedicated funding for school resource officers; an unspecified bond to fund school security improvements; the creation of a new district safety coordinator position for districts and broad coordination with law enforcement and mental health agencies to identify potential threats within education facilities.

None of the recommendations are binding on the governor or Legislature. Gov. Kay Ivey, who established the SAFE Council in an executive order in March, said in a statement Monday she was speaking with some agency heads about implementing the proposals but was otherwise noncommittal.

"Other recommendations need further consideration and will need some actions by the Alabama Legislature," the governor said in a statement. "I will continue to review the recommendations within this report, and other options not directly addressed by the report, to ensure all Alabama schools are as safe and secure as possible."

The report does not address whether existing levels of security in schools are adequate, or address costs.

"Each school's security needs are unique; therefore, local districts must be given an opportunity to assess their own security needs," the report says. "The state should support local districts by providing technical and financial support to local districts as they implement their physical security plans."

In a statement, former Alabama Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb criticized the lack of funding proposals.

"The report released by the SAFE Council makes recommendations that would make our schools safer, but without additional revenue to implement these recommendations, they are simply words on a page," the statement said.

Following the Parkland shootings, calls to address gun violence became widespread. The Florida Legislature passed legislation that raised age limits on the purchase of rifles; waiting periods and background checks and the arming of some teachers in certain cases. A few weeks after the shooting, Courtlin A. ... a 17-year-old student at Huffman High School in Birmingham, was shot and killed.

Democrats and Republicans filed gun bills after the shootings. The most controversial was introduced by Rep. Will Ainsworth, R-Guntersville which, in its initial form, would have allowed teachers who had gone through law enforcement training to carry firearms in schools. School board members opposed the measure, saying it would permanently alter their relationship with their students.

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Remington is moving its R1 pistol production line to its Huntsville location. (Photo: CONTRIBUTED )

Democrats proposed a wide series of measures, including one bill from Rep. Juandalynn Givan, D-Birmingham that would have imposed an age limit on the purchase of firearms, and another from Rep. Mary Moore, D-Birmingham, that would have banned the sale of semi-automatic weapons.

Givan and Moore's bills died near the end of the session when Republican members of a committee [failed to show up for a hearing \(/story/news/politics/southunionstreet/2018/03/21/house-members-miss-meeting-gun-proposals-likely-dooming-them/445621002/\)](#) on the legislation. Ainsworth's bill, which drew opposition from Democrats and some suburban Republican legislators, made it out of committee in a compromise version but did not advance further.

Legislative leadership was also divided over the proposals, with House Speaker Mac McCutcheon, R-Monrovia signaling an interest in an omnibus school safety measure, while Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, wanted to wait on the proposals – a view echoed by other legislators, whether out of a concern to get the issue right or fear of wading into a controversial issue months before the primaries.

The SAFE Council in some ways represented Marsh's approach winning. Convened in March, legislative leaders made it clear they would not advance any proposal that did not [first get a recommendation from the council \(/story/news/politics/southunionstreet/2018/03/06/school-safety-council-likely-delay-gun-bills-legislature/397357002/\)](#). The council's recommendations were due on April 30, more than a month after the Alabama Legislature ended its 2018 session.

The final report says nothing about arming teachers or restricting firearm access in any way. Instead, the report recommends dedicated funding streams for school resource officers and district safety coordinators, who would be responsible for handling school safety.

The report also recommends the hiring of more masters' level mental health professionals for schools, based on existing budgets; improved methods of reporting threats; training and the development of regional school safety teams.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that in 2016 Alabama had 21.5 deaths by firearm per 100,000 population, the second highest rate per capita in the nation. Firearms accounted for 67 percent of suicides in Alabama in 2014 and more than 70 percent in 2015, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health. Nationwide, firearms accounted for 49.8 percent of suicides in 2015.

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