



July 24, 2019

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
The Honorable Gary Peters
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Peters:

The 3 million members of the NEA and the 50 million students they serve thank you for the upcoming hearing on “Examining State and Federal Recommendations for Enhancing School Safety Against Targeted Violence.” NEA members are keenly aware of the need to safeguard school communities. However, this cannot come at the expense of students’ privacy and right to educational opportunity, an investment in the support programs and school professionals that will help students thrive, or by arming educators—an idea NEA members overwhelmingly oppose.

Many school districts are fixating on security and surveillance measures, but a skewed focus on these can send the message that school is a dangerous, potentially violent place. This keeps students from viewing school as a place of learning, where curiosity, imagination and expression can flourish.

NEA members believe that while it is wise to take commonsense measures to enhance school safety, it is crucial to examine the privacy and equity implications of school safety proposals and laws. Some target hardening technologies may undermine student privacy and discriminate against or profile students based on race, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual/gender orientation, family income, and other factors, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.

All students are entitled to an education that respects their civil rights and dignity and prepares them for healthy, successful lives. This is why NEA members believe we must focus on:

- Providing students with the dedicated professionals—including counselors and school psychologists—who can nurture well-being, offer emotional support, help students process difficult emotions, and identify behavioral concerns and mental health issues; and
- Enacting laws that would require background checks for all guns sold, as well as most transfers, and taking other steps to enhance gun safety.

In these times, it is crucial that we make students and educators safer. But as we do, we must not lose sight of the learning environments we wish to create, or the privacy and equity concerns that many targeting-hardening techniques raise.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association