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SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATION OF ARIZONA
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Our organization, the School Social Work Association of Arizona, believes that SB 1519 was drafted with good intentions for increasing a sense of safe learning environments for students in Arizona, but falls short in some critical areas. While it includes increased mandates on training for school staff on topics such as suicide prevention and warning signs of suicidal individuals, as well as mandates on training regarding school safety, there is no outline for how such trainings would be funded or descriptions of which individuals would be responsible with providing this training. SB 1519 offers the ability for districts to partner with local law enforcement to increase security, but again, does not make funding available for these partnerships. Additionally, we are concerned that there are no requirements for background checks for individuals wishing to purchase firearms within the language of this bill.

We are pleased to see requirements about individual campuses developing and regularly updating specific school safety plans. It is important to note that while some threats to campus safety can come from outside individuals, others can come from within the student body which is why a thoroughly vetted and comprehensive school safety plan is so critical.

School Social Workers are trained mental health providers who are able to deliver both prevention and intervention services to their campuses. School Social Workers are valuable resources to school staff in the area of mental health and safety. We believe that an increased presence in the amount of qualified school based mental health providers, including School Social Workers, is the key to successfully ensuring school campuses are adequately prepared to identify at-risk students, provide appropriate interventions, and connect families with additional resources through outside supporting agencies when necessary.

Students do their best learning in an environment where they feel safe and supported. With the continued instances of school-based violence across our nation, we feel it is critical that our legislators consider directing funds specifically targeted to provide the evidence-based training and services to individual campuses provided by their qualified school based mental health providers. It is our hope that future legislation will call for an increase in qualified school based mental health providers as well as a dedicated source of funding for districts to utilize in hiring these individuals.

Respectfully,

Emily Phares

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