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Wisconsin Council of Religious & Independent Schools

**TO:** Members, Assembly Education Committee

**FROM:** Daniel Henderson, WCRIS School Programs Coordinator

**SUBJECT:** Assembly Bill 53 - Crime Reporting in Schools

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on AB 53 and its impacts on the private schools participating in the parental choice programs.

The Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools (WCRIS) represents over 600 private schools and over 100,000 students in K-12 schools across the state. About two-thirds of those schools utilize the choice programs to carry out their mission of expanding access to the education they provide.

Thank you for your interest in school safety. Many families choose our schools because they provide safe havens for their children. Indeed, research shows that schools in a choice program are safer and students are less likely to be incarcerated in adulthood.

While WCRIS takes no position on AB 53, we offer testimony for information only. We suggest that the following issues may need clarification in order for the proposed law to function as envisioned:

1. We don't want educators to stop calling the police because they fear it will show up on statistics. School safety is an issue that needs prevention efforts. AB 53 may have the opposite effect. Due to general societal violence and mass shootings, we need more school staff comfort with law enforcement, not less.

2. How do the Constitutional "innocent until proven guilty" protections fit within the context of reporting an alleged crime? Must there be a guilty verdict before the school reports an incident? What's the threshold for waiting for something to be labeled an actual crime? The time lag is tremendous. Often what is reported to 911 turns out not to be true once the police are done with their official assessment of things. Anyone can call 911. In addition, because of court delays, parents could be notified far after an event actually occurred. This would not be very helpful, especially if charges are pled down or dismissed.

3. Who decides what the "crime" categories are and how an event will be characterized? There is a difference in students acting out, versus parents or other members of the public. School administrators are not trained in a consistent way to clarify this.

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Wisconsin Association of Independent Schools

Wisconsin Conference of Seventh Day Adventists

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Northern Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Western Wisconsin District

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Associate Members

PHONE
(608) 287-1224

E-MAIL
wcris.staff@wcris.org

WEBSITE
www.wcris.org

ADDRESS
110 East Main Street
Suite 802
Madison, WI 53703

4. The 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. limits are too early and too late in the day to hold school administrators responsible. Many do come early or stay late. But they may be gone before 10 p.m. and only janitorial staff left to lock up.. Shouldn't mandatory reporting be only required for an hour before and two hours after the school day officially starts/ends?

5. Shouldn't police departments be required to collect the info and send it to the Department of Justice Office of School Safety, which can collate it and issue an annual report to each school that could be shared with the public? This would be far more objective.

6. A model for this kind of reporting would be the federal Clery Act. The Act could be replicated on the state level for K-12 with some adjustments. The Act is likely already well-known to many in law enforcement. Why reinvent the wheel?

7. Even with those changes, however, private schools would still struggle to comply with additional state-mandated paperwork. Our administrators are already too busy struggling with the teacher and substitute shortage.

Thank you for your consideration. Please take time to resolve these issues before advancing AB 53. Don't hesitate to contact me, or WCRIS Executive Director Sharon Schmeling, if our office can be of additional service.

I'll be happy to take any questions.