



Testimony of Russell Bentley (7/20/2022)

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and other honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, I appreciate your concerns for school safety and am grateful to have an opportunity to do my best to try to assist you in your important efforts. My name is Russell Bentley, and I am here on behalf of the world's largest K12 school safety center, Safe Havens International, Inc. ("Safe Havens"). Safe Havens is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization whose analysts have worked in all 50 states, U.S. Territories and over two dozen countries with a goal to help make schools safer wherever children happened to live and attend school. Safe Havens analysts have assisted the U.S. Departments of Education, Justice and Homeland Security and have provided assistance to school safety efforts of the administrations of President William Clinton, President George Bush Jr., and President Barak Obama as well as to government agencies in Canada, India, Israel, Poland, Vietnam and Trinidad-Tobago to make schools safer for students and those who dedicate their lives to educating them. I have been a full-time school safety practitioner for more than 32 years and have worked with K12 school districts, faith-based, charter and independent schools in over 30 states.

My main message for you today is that while there are many things that can make schools safer, I would like to see greater access to and utilization of the immense, excellent and unparalleled school safety resources that have been developed by a host of federal government agencies over the past three decades. The U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, and Homeland Security, the United States Secret Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, the US Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and other federal agencies and departments have worked tirelessly to develop what I feel are superb resources and programs that are available at no cost to our nation's schools. However, during our school safety, security, climate, culture and emergency preparedness assessments of more than 8,500 K12 schools and our official post-incident assistance for 23 active assailant and targeted shootings in K12 schools, we have found that

many school districts and non-public schools still lack some extremely effective and important prevention measures.

One particularly important approach that I have extensive experience with involves student threat assessment and management. Working with School Social Worker Mitch Mitchell in the early 1990s when I was a deputy chief of school police, our departments developed what is likely the first multi-disciplinary threat assessment team which helped avert tragedies including a planned middle school bombing by a deeply troubled student who espoused Nazi beliefs and desired to kill African American students. We had such success with this approach that by using federal grants, we formed two full-time student intervention teams with a school social worker and a school district police officer working out of a patrol car in each team.

Since that time, multiple federal agencies and subject matter experts from various sectors have dramatically advanced student threat assessment and management processes. Unlike many other approaches, threat assessment and management teams offer significant protection from attacks regardless of the type of weapons used, the time of day and location of an attack. They help protect students and school employees in classrooms, lunchrooms, media centers, school grounds, school buses and athletic events.

While there are many other things that can and do make our nation's schools safer, I urge you to do what you can to enable the National Threat Assessment Center of the Secret Service to build upon this incredibly important body of knowledge and the work of so many under the inspired leadership of both parties, and to provide the Center with additional resources to provide even greater support for our nation's public and non-public schools. I have immense faith in the ability of the dedicated men and women of the Center to improve our ability to prevent planned acts of school violence.

Thank you for your service to our nation and for allowing me to share my thoughts with you today.