



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Gov. Lee Signs Strong School Safety Measures Into Law** *Commends \$230M to protect Tennessee students & teachers*

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** – Today, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed strong school safety [legislation](#) into law and recognized the investment of more than \$230 million to strengthen safety at public and private schools across Tennessee.

“Nothing is more important than Tennessee students and teachers returning home from school safely each day,” **said Gov. Lee.** “Every year since 2019, we’ve worked with the General Assembly to prioritize school safety, and this year, we’ve passed significant measures to fund an armed SRO for every public school, enhance mental health support and boost physical security at public and private schools across Tennessee.”

At the beginning of the 2023 [legislative session](#), Gov. Lee introduced a bill to strengthen physical security at every public school and enhance accountability in school safety protocols, in addition to an initial [budget proposal](#) that included \$30 million for 122 Homeland Security agents to serve students at both public and private schools in every Tennessee county.

Following the tragic Covenant shooting, Gov. Lee worked with the General Assembly to enhance his legislation and increase funding in the Fiscal Year 23-24 budget to place an armed School Resource Officer (SRO) at every Tennessee public school, boost physical school security at public and private schools, and provide additional mental health resources for Tennesseans.

#### **Enhanced School Safety Legislation**

- Enacts a multi-tiered accountability plan to ensure exterior doors are locked while students are present
- Requires that private security guards receive active shooter training prior to being posted at schools
- Requires every school district to establish threat assessment teams to ensure students are connected to support services and behavioral health professionals when appropriate
- Requires every public and private school to develop annual safety plans, including a newly required incident command drill for school leaders and law enforcement

#### **\$230 Million in School Safety Funding**

- \$30 million for more than 100 Homeland Security agents across all 95 counties to serve Tennesseans and students in both public and non-public schools
- \$140 million for one full-time, armed School Resource Officer (SRO) for every public school
- \$40 million for public school security upgrades
- \$14 million for private school security upgrades
- \$8 million for additional School-Based Behavioral Health Liaisons across the state

Since 2019, Gov. Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly have prioritized investments in school safety every year. In June 2021, the Governor signed [Executive Order 97](#) and launched a statewide effort to enhance school safety by boosting collaboration among parents, schools and local law enforcement across the state. A complete list of Gov. Lee's school safety actions to date can be found [here](#).

Gov. Lee appreciates the support of legislative leaders in the Tennessee General Assembly to strengthen school safety:

"Governor Lee and my colleagues in the General Assembly have made great strides on school safety over the years," **said Lieutenant Governor Randy McNally**. "But more needed to be done and we answered that call this session. Hardening security at our public and private schools is no longer just a priority, it is an imperative. The safety of our schools is of paramount importance and I am grateful we were in the financial position to quickly allocate the funds for these improvements. I would like to thank Governor Lee for bringing the legislation and Leader Johnson and Chairman Lundberg for shepherding it through the Senate. This historic investment makes clear our state's commitment to keeping our schools safe."

"This year's extraordinary funding for school and student safety will provide noticeable protections for all of our schools," **said House Speaker Cameron Sexton**. "Whether adding a School Resource Officer (SRO) in every school, hardening security systems at facilities, and doubling the number of resources for students with mental health issues - our schools, staff, and teachers will now have more resources at their disposal to support the physical, mental, and emotional health of all Tennessee students. We will continue speaking with members and Tennesseans about further improvements to school safety, additional resources to improve mental health outcomes, and the best ways forward to keep our children and schools safe."

"Every child in Tennessee should have a safe environment to learn," **said Senate Majority Leader Jack Johnson**. "Every parent should be able to trust that their children will be protected while they are at school. This legislation will make significant improvements to school security and give parents confidence that their child's school is held to strict statewide security standards. I appreciate Governor Lee, Chairman Lundberg and my colleagues in the General Assembly for identifying these areas of improvements and passing legislation that will have a lasting impact on protecting our schools."

"Children and their teachers should always be safe at school," **said House Majority Leader William Lamberth**. "This legislation, along with additional investments being made this year, will greatly enhance the security at public and private schools across our state. I commend Governor Lee and my Republican colleagues for their continued commitment to increasing school safety in Tennessee."

"Many months of work from legislators, Governor Lee and his team have been invested into this impactful legislation that builds on our efforts to improve school safety," **said Chairman Jon Lundberg**. "The important safety standards outlined in this bill raise the bar for schools across the state and will go a long way to ensuring our schools are secure. It also reinforces the unwavering commitment of the General Assembly to do all we can to prevent future tragedies like the one at Covenant School. I was proud to be a part of passing this legislation."

"Tennessee children and educators should never have to worry about their well-being while at school," **said Chairman Mark White**. "The enhanced safety measures and investments our state is making to strengthen school security will allow them to focus on what matters most in the classroom – learning. I am proud to stand with Governor Lee, Speaker Sexton, Leader Lamberth and my colleagues in the General Assembly to prioritize the safety and well-being of Tennessee's students and teachers."

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