



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Nine Groups Call for Gov. Abbott to Appoint Task Force to Address School Policing

AUSTIN, TX - Citing recent police use of force on students in Texas schools by school resource officers, today nine advocacy organizations called on Gov. Greg Abbott to establish a task force to examine school policing issues in preparation for the 2017 legislative session and school year.

The [letter to the governor](#), signed by Texas groups focused on children's policy, civil rights, mental health and education, explained, "We would like to work together to ensure all students are able to learn in safe school environments and school police have clearly defined roles and effective training."

The letter notes past high-profile incidents in Texas schools, including an incident in which an officer slammed a six-year-old Abilene ISD student into a desk, leading to a recent lawsuit; an incident in which an officer slammed a 12-year-old San Antonio ISD student face-first into the ground in a video shared throughout the country; and a 2013 incident in which an officer used a Taser on a Bastrop ISD high school student who had broken up a fight, causing him to fall to the ground and suffer a life-changing traumatic brain injury.

"We all want to make sure students are in class learning and staying safe," said Lauren Rose, Director of Youth Justice Policy at Texans Care for Children, a nonprofit, multi-issue children's policy organization. "A state level task force should develop clear policies that will better support students, police and teachers. We need to provide officers the support and guidance they need so students are safe and officers can avoid another cell phone video gone viral."

"We know Gov. Abbott has placed a priority on ensuring that all Texas children are able to thrive in safe, healthy environments," said Deborah Fowler, executive director of Texas Appleseed, a public interest justice center. "We hope he'll join us in our desire to take a hard look at making sure that in our efforts to keep our schools safe, we aren't at the same time exposing students to traumatic, harmful experiences with school police. Students and parents shouldn't have to wait for another lawsuit or troubling video to surface before we take action."

The organizations emphasized these incidents "highlight the need for a robust dialogue around the appropriate role of law enforcement officers in our schools and the need for all school police officers to receive youth-specific training."

The letter notes that in 2015, the Texas Legislature recognized the need to address the issue, requiring officers in school districts with more than 30,000 students to undergo training on working with youth and serving on a school campus. Approximately half of all Texas students reside in school districts with fewer than 30,000 students.

"No parent sends their child to school thinking that a grown man will body slam her to the ground," said Matt Simpson, senior policy strategist for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Texas. "In fact, if a father body-slammed his daughter, it would be considered child abuse. Physical force should only be used as a last resort by school police. An immediate and thorough review of use-in-force is sorely needed to ensure students across the state are safe and trust school police."

The letter also urges the governor to end participation in the U.S. Department of Defense's 1033 Program, which provides military weapons for school police officers to use in K-12 public schools.

MEDIA NOTE:

A copy of the letter is available online at bit.ly/SchoolPolicingLetter.

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