



Wisconsin Family Ties

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Safe Schools Are Well-Resourced, Not “Hardened”

Madison, WI – Wisconsin Family Ties is pleased to hear that there is potentially \$100 million available for improving Wisconsin’s school safety, and appalled that the proposed special session legislative package appears to squander the funding on “hardening” schools, particularly by hiring more armed officers.

High school students spoke passionately and articulately on the Capitol steps yesterday, describing the experience of losing their innocence through regular participation in active-shooter trainings since kindergarten. They pleaded with lawmakers not to turn their schools into prisons, and not to put more law enforcement officers into their schools, as we as a nation have been doing since the Columbine massacre in 1999. Instead, they called for the legislature to address the easy availability of guns designed to kill as many people as possible as quickly as possible.

The students’ concerns about armed officers in schools are well-founded. According to the Congressional Research Office, “The body of research on the effectiveness of SRO (school resource officer) programs is limited, both in terms of the number of studies published and the methodological rigor of the studies conducted. The research that is available draws conflicting conclusions about whether SRO programs are effective at reducing school violence. Also, the research does not address whether SRO programs deter school shootings.” <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>

In addition to the lack of evidence regarding their effectiveness in violence prevention, it is well-documented that school-based officers become unnecessarily involved in routine school discipline issues. Their presence has been correlated to an increase in charges for low-level offenses, particularly for students of color.

According to Joanne Juhnke, policy director for Wisconsin Family Ties, “We just learned Wednesday that Broward County in Florida is not going to be able to hire the special educators that they had planned to add, because they’ve spent the money to turn Stoneman Douglas into an armed fortress. When we throw millions of dollars at ‘hardening’ our schools, we continue to starve them of the resources necessary to be engaging places of learning, where students are well-supported instead of dangerously disconnected. We condemn our students and their teachers to oversize classes with inadequate student-services and special education staffing, and we fail to provide support to the struggling families who all-too-often get blamed when things go wrong at school.”

Wisconsin Family Ties strongly believes that our state must do better. We need to educate our students in well-resourced schools, we need to ensure that all children and families are connected to their communities and are receiving needed supports, and we need to resist the temptation to make over our schools into mini-prisons. This legislative package needs to go back to the drawing board.

Wisconsin Family Ties, Wisconsin’s family voice for children’s mental health, is a parent-run nonprofit organization serving families that include children with social, emotional, behavioral or mental health challenges. Founded in 1987, its mission is to change lives by improving children’s mental health.

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Wisconsin’s family voice for children’s mental health

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