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## **Delaware County officials provide update on county and school safety plans**

In the wake of the recent school shooting in Parkland, Florida, Delaware County Council Chairman John McBlain and District Attorney Katayoun M. Copeland provided an update at the Delaware County Emergency Services Center in Middletown on the resources and tools available to schools in Delaware County to help keep students safe from threats and acts of violence.

In the aftermath of the 2012 school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, Delaware County Council and the District Attorney's office sought funding to install panic buttons in every school in the county, including public, private, parochial and accredited kindergarten programs.

In Delaware County, all 230 schools received a panic button in 2013 that directly and immediately alerts law enforcement to a dangerous intruder or potential threat to the students and staff, known as the Delaware County Panic Alarm School System (DelPASS).

"The benefit of a silent panic button is that it is instantaneous. By pushing a button, there is an immediate code red alert to the 911 Center," said County Council Chairman John P. McBlain. "There is also an audio component that allows 911 dispatchers to hear events occurring in real time and to relay exactly what is happening to responding law enforcement."

Chairman McBlain said silent alarms are critical in situations where someone cannot reach a landline or use a cellphone. The Delaware County system utilizes a dedicated, secure phone line to reach the 911 Center.

"Two days after Sandy Hook, County Council and the District Attorney met with the school superintendents, at the Delaware County Intermediate Unit and we looked at ways we could improve school safety," said Chairman McBlain. "The superintendents indicated they believed silent alarms or panic buttons would greatly enhance safety so we immediately sought funding to make that happen. We are continually meeting with our schools and local law enforcement to look at ways to improve school safety."

District Attorney Katayoun M. Copeland said her office continually works with school personnel, law enforcement and emergency responders to enhance school safety. Each year, the District Attorney hosts a Safe Schools Summit focused on responding to an active shooter in the school including focusing on preventing and responding to active shooter scenarios.

“In Delaware County, we have great schools. It is our goal to ensure learning can happen in a safe and secure environment. The panic buttons are another layer of technology that we have available to make our schools safer and to help law enforcement respond more quickly to a threat,” said District Attorney Copeland. “As the chief law enforcement officer for Delaware County, combined with the strengths of our partners on Delaware County Council and our dedicated police officers, we will continue to work together to protect our schools.”

She said that speed of response to an emergency in a school is critical and that in recent cases, the violence takes place in the first few minutes that the intruder is on site. “Saving time saves lives when it comes to emergency response,” said District Attorney Copeland. “These silent alarms greatly reduce the time gap between someone recognizing a threat and calling for and getting help. We are constantly training and conducting drills on school safety, but we can never get complacent when it comes to the well-being of our students and teachers,” said District Attorney Copeland.

For the DelPASS system, when the button is pushed, a recorded message is immediately sent to the 911 Center, including the school name and address and device location. In addition to the audio message to a 911 call taker, a digital message appears on the call taker’s screen. Police are immediately dispatched and the dispatcher can continue to listen to the sounds of the incident. If the police confirm the incident as active, the 911 dispatcher can also use the RSAN system to alert school leaders.

The newest component that is being jointly funded by Delaware County Council and the District Attorney’s Office, is the 911 Center Command sector, located at the Department of Emergency Services. The Command Center uses video capabilities and social media to gain enhanced situational awareness of emergency scenes.

“All of our public schools attended by 71,000 students in Delaware County, plus private and parochial schools with thousands of students have received this system. It is our goal to make each school community as safe as humanly possible using the latest resources and technology,” said Chairman McBlain. “Of course we hope the panic buttons are never needed, but we want our school families to be reassured that help stands ready at the push of that red button.”

Chairman McBlain noted that there are resources available for residents who may be at risk for emotional crisis through the Delaware County Crisis Connects Team (DCCCT).

“We strongly believe that emotional and mental health is a community issue, not just an individual issue,” said Chairman McBlain. “In Delaware County, concerned members of the community can access Mobile Crisis when they feel that someone else requires immediate psychiatric evaluation. If you, or someone else, need immediate help with a mental health or substance abuse issue, Crisis Connections Team Mobile Crisis can come to you. You can call mobile crisis at 1-855-889-7827 any time of the day or night.”

The Delaware County Crisis Connections Team program was developed and is managed by Elwyn Crisis Services on behalf of the Delaware County Office of Behavioral Health and Magellan Behavioral Health of Pennsylvania, Inc. Crisis services offered by the program are available free of charge to all children and adults residing in Delaware County. For information, you can visit the Department of Human Services at [www.co.delaware.pa.us](http://www.co.delaware.pa.us).

DCCCT Mobile Crisis is available 24 hours a day, every day of the week by calling **1-855-889-7827**

