

Date of Hearing: January 7, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Al Muratsuchi, Chair

AB 68 (Gallagher) – As Amended January 5, 2026

[This bill was double referred to the Assembly Public Safety Committee and may be heard by that Committee as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]

SUBJECT: School safety: armed school resource officers

SUMMARY: Requires, commencing with the 2028-29 school year, a rural school district or charter school to determine the appropriate number of armed school resource officers (SROs) for each school and to ensure that at least one armed SRO is present at each school during regular school hours. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Requires, commencing with the 2028-29 school year and each year thereafter, a rural school district or charter school to determine the appropriate number of armed school resource officers (SRO) for each school of the rural school district or charter school.
- 2) Requires the governing board or body of the rural school district or charter school to ensure that at least one armed SRO is present at each school during regular school hours.
- 3) Applies to a school with an enrollment of 20 or more students and which is located 10 or more miles from the nearest census-designated urban area.
- 4) Authorizes the governing board or body of the school district or charter school to claim a good cause exception from these requirements, by adopting a resolution, if they are unable to comply due to the unavailability of funding or personnel who qualify to serve as an SRO.
- 5) Requires a governing board or body that has adopted a resolution claiming a good cause exception to develop a plan and timeline to comply with the requirements to the greatest extent possible for each relevant school.
- 6) Authorizes the plan to include, but not be limited to, either or both of the following: (a) rotating armed SROs among schools in the school district based on priority; (b) jointly contracting with another school district or charter school for armed SROs.
- 7) Requires that a school district's or charter school's costs of implementing these provisions be reimbursed as a state mandate, and prohibits the use of funding provided to school districts and charter schools through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) for this purpose.
- 8) Defines a “rural school district or charter school” as one that is located in one or more counties where the total enrollment of students in the county in kindergarten through 12th grade is fewer than 40,000 students.
- 9) Defines a “school resource officer” as an individual who is a peace officer and is employed by or contracted to be assigned to a school district or a charter school.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Asserts that all students and staff of public primary, elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, and community colleges, colleges, and universities have the inalienable right to attend campuses that are safe, secure, and peaceful. (California Constitution, Article 1, Section 28)
- 2) Authorizes the governing board of a school district to establish a school police department under the supervision of a school chief of police, and to employ peace officers to ensure the safety of school district personnel and pupils, and the security of the real and personal property of the school district. Specifies that persons employed and compensated as members of a police department of a school district, when appointed and duly sworn, are peace officers, for the purposes of carrying out their duties of employment (Education Code (EC) 38000 and 38001).
- 3) Authorizes the governing board of a school district to establish a security department under the supervision of a chief of security, and to employ personnel to ensure the safety of school district personnel and pupils and the security of the real and personal property of the school district. Expresses the intent of the Legislature that a school district security department be supplementary to city and county law enforcement agencies and not vested with general police powers (EC 38000).
- 4) Provides that any peace officer employed by a K-12 public school district who has completed training as prescribed shall be designated a school police officer (Penal Code (PEN) 830.32).
- 5) Requires any school police officer first employed by a K-12 public school district to successfully complete a basic course of training before exercising the powers of a peace officer. Also requires the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) to prepare a specialized course of instruction for the training of school peace officers to meet the unique safety needs of a school environment and for such officers to complete the specialized training within two years of the date of first employment (PEN 832.3).
- 6) Requires each school district or county office of education (COE) to be responsible for the overall development of all comprehensive school safety plans for its schools operating kindergarten or any of grades 1 through 12 (EC 32281).
- 7) Requires the petition to establish a charter school to include the development of a school safety plan and the annual review and update of the plan. (EC 47605 and 47605.6)
- 8) Encourages that, as school safety plans are reviewed, plans be updated to include clear guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of mental health professionals, community intervention professionals, school counselors, SROs, and police officers on school campuses, if the school district employs these people (EC 32282.1).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “Every child has a fundamental right to attend school without fear. National research clearly indicates a sharp increase in school shootings and gun violence on school grounds, a trend that sadly spares no state. In California, the tragic events in rural areas like the Rancho Tehama Reserve shooting, where the attacker accessed the elementary school unimpeded, and the planned attack at Evergreen Middle School underscore the immediate risk. For these rural schools, local law enforcement response times can be catastrophically long—sometimes 10 to 30 minutes or more—leaving students and staff defenseless when seconds count. Prior legislation removed a vital, cost-effective security option by restricting the ability of superintendents to designate CCW-licensed staff as security, disproportionately harming these cash-strapped, distant districts.

AB 68 delivers a tailored, realistic solution by placing specially trained, armed School Resource Officers (SROs) on campus during all hours pupils are present in qualifying rural schools. This is not an attempt to roll back existing firearm laws, but to work within them to secure our students using highly trained professionals. The evidence is clear: SROs are crucial assets who not only address crime but also serve as a liaison and a positive force to promote public safety within the communities they serve.”

The role of SROs. According to the California School Resource Officers’ Association:

According to the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), the role of SROs includes three primary responsibilities:

- Ensuring a safe and secure campus;
- Educating students about law-related topics; and
- Mentoring students as counselors and role models.

“The role of the SRO is to assist in building a positive school culture by implementing the main duties of the SRO, working closely with the school leadership team, and making a positive impact on the school community while focusing on school safety. The four main duties are: a counselor by talking with students and staff and offering guidance and assistance; a teacher by providing classroom presentations, support On-Campus Intervention or Saturday School through discussions and lessons, staff development and informational sessions for parents; a social worker by linking students, parents and staff with resources and services; lastly, as a law enforcement professional when all other options are exhausted or the case warrants tier three interventions or arrest. The majority of SRO – student contacts are positive in nature and serve to connect the student with another caring adult on campus or to provide mentoring, guidance, and connections to needed services.”

The NASRO further notes that SROs who follow NASRO’s best practices do not arrest students for disciplinary issues that would be handled by teachers or administrators if the SRO were not present. They contend that SROs help troubled students avoid involvement with the juvenile justice system.

A 2014 U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) publication, “Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline,” notes that schools choosing to use school-

based law enforcement officers should ensure that these officers' roles are focused on protecting the physical safety of the school and preventing criminal conduct. The USDOE further recommends that schools ensure that school-based law enforcement officers do not become involved in routine school disciplinary matters.

Requirements for school police or SROs. School-based law enforcement refers to situations in which one or more trained police officers work full-time or part-time on school property. A school district may choose to have its own dedicated police department or may establish a relationship with a local law enforcement agency to have one or more SROs assigned to one or more school properties. Both members of a school district police department or SROs assigned to a school site by a local law enforcement agency are sworn peace officers who carry firearms, have arrest powers, and wear a police department badge. These officers have successfully completed a minimum of 800-1,200 hours of training in a police academy program in order to initially qualify as a peace officer and to carry firearms.

Current law in California requires SROs to take additional training specific to law enforcement in an educational setting. The NASRO offers "The Basic School Resource Officer Course," a forty-hour block of instruction designed for any law enforcement officer with two years or less experience working in an educational environment. This course includes the following topics:

- Foundations of School-Based Law Enforcement;
- Ethics and the SRO;
- The SRO as a Teacher/Guest Speaker;
- Diversity;
- Understanding Special Needs Students;
- Social Media;
- School Law;
- The SRO as an Informal Counselor/Mentor;
- Understanding the Teen Brain;
- Violence and Victimization: Challenges to Development;
- Sex Trafficking of Youth;
- Effects of Youth Trends and Drugs on the School Culture and Environment;
- Threat Response: Preventing Violence in School Settings;
- School Safety and Emergency Operations Plans; and
- Crime Prevention through Environmental Design.

Who are school resource officers? A national survey of 400 SROs in 2018 identified the following:

- 84% of SROs are male and 16% female;

- 69% are White, 21% Black, 5% Hispanic, 4% other;
- 42% work in suburban schools, 37% rural, and 21% urban;
- 70% are assigned to high schools, 58% to middle schools, and 50% to elementary schools;
- 57% of SROs are employed by a local police or sheriff's office, while 20% are part of a school police department;
- 75% reported having experience working with youth prior to becoming an SRO;
- In responding to what they see as their primary role, 59% responded ensuring safety and security; other responses included enforcing laws, mentoring, enforcing school discipline, and teaching;
- Of the officers employed by local police or sheriff's departments, 100% carry a gun, 99% handcuffs, 65% Taser, 62% mace, and 33% wear a body camera; and
- Of the officers employed by a school police department, 86% carry a gun, 95% handcuffs, 37% Taser, 52% mace, and 24% wear a body camera. (Education Week Research Center, 2018)

The prevalence of peace officers on school campuses. According to national survey data of 2,400 public schools collected by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in 2022, 52% of public schools reported having any sworn law enforcement officers, including SROs, present at school at least once per week. This varied significantly based on the size of the school.

A Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) 2020 report noted that some California school districts, including Oakland, West Contra Costa, and Pajaro Valley Unified School District have ended their SRO agreements with local police departments in recent years. The Oakland Unified School District's Reparations for Black Students resolution, passed in 2021, called for the elimination of the Oakland Schools Police Department and the redirection of resources toward student safety supports, as designated in the community-driven safety plan created by the Black Organizing Project.

The PPIC report notes that high schools are more likely to have SROs (37%) than middle schools (16%) or elementary schools (10%). As SROs are more prevalent among schools with higher enrollment, the percentage of students who attend schools with SROs is much higher: two-thirds of high school students, one-quarter of middle school students, and 11% of elementary students.

Differing views regarding law enforcement presence on school campuses. Authors advocating for school-based law enforcement contend that when law enforcement officers are carefully selected and trained for placement in schools, their presence can reduce crime and improve students' feeling of safety and their learning outcomes (Canaday, 2012). Others contend that school-based law enforcement has led to increased criminalization of developmentally typical misbehavior and the disproportionate targeting of youth of color, leading to their increased contact with the juvenile justice system. (Justice Policy Institute, 2011)

Reviews of the literature have suggested that there is insufficient evidence for drawing a definitive conclusion about the overall effectiveness of school-based law enforcement programs and that there is no conclusive evidence that the presence of school-based law enforcement has a positive effect on student perceptions of safety in their schools. (Petrosino, 2012)

Surveys of California middle and high school students indicate that student perceptions of security differ by race and gender. African American students, females, and students who have experienced school violence report feeling less safe in schools with an SRO, while males and students with strong connections to their schools feel more safe. (PPIC, 2020)

A study based on data from U.S. public schools during the period 2014-2018 concluded that SROs do effectively reduce some forms of violence in schools but do not prevent school shootings or gun-related incidents. The study also reported that SROs intensify the use of suspensions, expulsions, police referrals, and arrests of students. These effects are consistently over two times larger for Black students than White students. It was also reported that SROs increase chronic absenteeism, particularly for Black students as well as students with disabilities. (Sorensen, 2021) A review of research found that schools recorded an increase of 21% more incidents of exclusionary discipline after the introduction of SROs. (Fisher, 2016)

Alternative approaches to preventing school violence. Following the deadly shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida in 2018, a group of over 200 universities, national education and mental health groups, school districts, and more than 2,300 individual experts signed on to “A Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America.” This document suggests that rather than having armed officers, metal detectors, or locked doors in schools, the focus should be on prevention by improving the social and emotional health of the schools. Their eight-point plan includes the following elements:

- A national requirement for all schools to assess school climate and maintain physically and emotionally safe conditions and positive school environments that protect all students and adults from bullying, discrimination, harassment, and assault;
- A ban on assault-style weapons, high-capacity ammunition clips, and products that modify semi-automatic firearms to enable them to function like automatic firearms;
- Adequate staffing (such as counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers) of coordinated school- and community-based mental health services for individuals with risk factors for violence, recognizing that violence is not intrinsically a product of mental illness;
- Reform of school discipline to reduce exclusionary practices and foster positive social, behavioral, emotional, and academic success for students;
- Universal background checks to screen out violent offenders, persons who have been hospitalized for violence towards self or others, and persons on no-fly, terrorist watch lists;
- A national program to train and maintain school- and community-based threat assessment teams that include mental health and law enforcement partners. Threat assessment programs should include practical channels of communication for persons to report potential threats as well as interventions to resolve conflicts and assist troubled individuals;

- Removal of legal barriers to sharing safety-related information among educational, mental health, and law enforcement agencies in cases where a person has threatened violence; and
- Laws establishing Gun Violence Protection Orders that allow courts to issue time-limited restraining orders requiring that firearms be recovered by law enforcement when there is evidence that an individual is planning to carry out acts against others or themselves.

This document lays out a more comprehensive approach to preventing school violence, but among other things, requires significant investments in pupil support services.

Funding SROs on campuses. This bill prohibits a school district or charter school from using its LCFF apportionment to fund SROs on K-12 school sites and specifies that such expenses be reimbursed as a state mandate. Other than their LCFF funding, the only significant funding schools receive is specially designated funding for special education services, home-to-school transportation, or other federal funds for designated purposes. This creates a “Catch-22” situation: by prohibiting districts from expending LCFF funds for this purpose, there would be no mandated expenditure to be reimbursed.

This bill also requires the creation of a new mandate requiring the state to reimburse districts for the costs associated with deploying officers. If the Commission on State Mandates finds that this is a state-mandated local program, the Commission would then have to determine the level of reimbursement for this purpose. There is no indication in the bill that any additional funding would be allocated to the block grant to cover this very significant outlay of funds.

Arguments in support. The Glenn County Office of Education writes, “Armed school resource officers play a critical role in emergency preparedness, rapid response to threats, and overall campus security, particularly in rural areas where law enforcement response times can be significantly delayed. This bill, as amended, offers a balanced approach to safeguarding our schools without imposing undue burdens on local districts, making a meaningful difference in the lives of students, educators, and families in underserved regions.”

Arguments in opposition. The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence writes, “We recognize your good intentions in this bill, stating that AB 68 furthers your “sacred duty” as an elected official to protect the “most vulnerable citizens from this harm, this includes our children at school.” But, evidence shows that mandatory armed SROs would not protect California’s children and might actually harm them. A systematic review of 32 studies on SROs concluded that “If the intent of SROs is to prevent crime and delinquency in schools, this study found no evidence that this intent is being accomplished.” As an example of such studies, one found that “the presence of a school resource officer was unassociated with any reduction in school shooting severity” from 1999 to 2018. Another study, in 2021, found that the presence of an armed SRO was associated with increased casualties, perhaps because “many school shooters are actively suicidal, intending to die in the act, so an armed officer may be an incentive rather than a deterrent.”

In addition to scientific research, there are horrific, real-life examples that SROs do not prevent harm. The armed SRO at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida did not stop a shooter from killing 17 students and staff; in fact,

the SRO ran away and hid in a closet. An armed SRO at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas did not stop a shooter from killing 10 students and staff. Indeed, even the presence of dozens of armed police officers did not protect students as they failed to intervene in a shooting that killed 21 students and teachers at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas.

In the end, there is no evidence that armed SROs protect children from school shootings. To the contrary, evidence suggests that armed SROs harm children, especially those who are Black, Brown, low-income, or have disabilities. For example, a 2016 study of educators found that “even when behavioral concerns were not present, regardless of race and ethnicity, participants inaccurately reported seeing behavioral concerns from the Black children.” The presence of SROs has led to an increase in arrests, suspensions, and expulsions within those groups. Those who have been arrested find themselves trapped in the justice system – with the associated ills of incarceration – and are unable to graduate.”

Related legislation. AB 3038 (Essayli) of the 2023-24 Session would have required a school district or charter school with an enrollment of 50 students or more to hire or contract with at least one armed SRO to be present at each school of the school district or charter school during regular school hours and any other time when students are present on campus, beginning with high schools in 2025, and adding middle/junior high schools serving students in grades 6 to 8 in 2026, and elementary schools in 2027. This bill failed passage in the Assembly Education Committee.

SB 1026 (Smallwood-Cuevas) of the 2023-24 Session requires LEAs that enter into contract on or after January 1, 2025, with a private licensed security agency to provide school security services to specify the parameters on the use of weapons, including handcuffs, pepper spray, batons, and firearms, on a school campus and also to specify the roles and responsibilities of school administrators, school security department personnel, and contracted school security officers, in ensuring the safety of personnel and students, consistent with assigning school administrators primary responsibility for de-escalation. This bill was held in the Senate Education Committee.

AB 1299 (Jackson) of the 2023-24 Session would have required that school safety plans developed by school districts and charter schools include procedures and policies relating to the use of police officers on a school campus; prohibit the use of handcuffs or pepper spray on a school campus, except under specified conditions; require SROs not employed or under contract to report to, and obtain approval from, school principals before accessing a schoolsite; and requires specified training to be provided to SROs under contract with a school district. This bill was held on the Assembly Floor.

AB 750 (Chen) of the 2019-20 Session would have required school districts and charter schools to have at least one school resource officer present at each school during regular school hours and any other time when pupils are present on campus. This bill failed passage in the Assembly Education Committee.

AB 2067 (Gallagher) of the 2017-18 Session would have required school districts and charter schools to ensure there is at least one armed SRO present at each school during regular school hours and any other time when students are on campus. It would also have prohibited funding

this requirement from the district or charter school's LCFF apportionment and specified expenses were to be reimbursed as a state mandate. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 202 (Donnelly) of the 2013 Session would have established the School Marshal Plan and authorizes school districts, COEs, and charter schools to use general-purpose funds to provide training for school marshals. Defined "school marshal" as a school employee who is authorized to possess a firearm at a schoolsite or designated school activities. This bill failed passage in the Assembly Education Committee.

AB 2368 (Block) Chapter 146, Statutes of 2012, authorizes the governing board of a school district to establish a school police department under the supervision of a school chief of police, and authorizes the employment of peace officers to ensure the safety of school district personnel and pupils, and the security of the real and personal property of the school district.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Glenn County Office of Education
Riverside County Sheriff's Office

Opposition

Alameda County Office of Education
Brady Campaign
California School Boards Association
California Teachers Association
Oakland Privacy
Team Enough

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