

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PENNSYLVANIA COMMISSION ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY
3101 North Front Street, Harrisburg, PA

School Safety and Security Committee Skype Meeting

July 29, 2020

MINUTES

Members/Designees:

Mr. Derin Myers, Designee for Chairman Ramsey
Ms. Janice Bart, Member
Senator James Brewster, Member
Representative Donna Bullock, Member
Ms. Nikki Bricker Cameron, Member
Col. Robert Evanchick, Member
Mr. David Hein, Member
Dr. Gerald Huesken, Designee for Secretary Rivera
Mr. Mike Hurley, Member
Representative Jason Ortitay, Member
Mr. Randy Padfield, Member
Dr. Jamie Piraino, Member
Mr. Joseph Regan, Member
Mr. Jonathan Ross, Member
Dr. Helena Tuleya-Payne, Member
Mr. Mike Vereb, Designee for Josh Shapiro

Staff:

Pamela Bennett
Lindsay Busko
Christina Cosgrove-Rooks
Chris Epoca
Lynn Fidler
Kirsten Kenyon
Rebecca Kiehl
Samantha Koch
Geoffrey Kolchin
Carol Kuntz
Debra Sandifer

Guests:

Andrew Barnes, Governor's Office
Kara Beem, Greenlee Partners
Jonathan Berger, PA School Board Association (PSBA)
Gwenn Dando, PA Senate
Mike Deery, PA Senate
Lizzy Hardison, PA Capital Star
Bradley Keen, PA House of Representatives Appropriations Committee (D)
Vince Kovach, Pa Department of Education
Scott Kuren, PA Department of Education
Christine Seitz, PA House of Representatives
Vicki Wilken, PA Senate

I. Call to Order and Adoption of Minutes

Mr. Myers called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM and welcomed participants. A quorum of members was established. Mr. Myers pointed out that the agenda concludes with the Committee going into Executive Session to discuss the Pennsylvania State Police Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Team (RVAT) annual report as it contains confidential information. He stated that attendees who are not Committee members or designees will be asked to leave the meeting or will be removed from the call.

Mr. Myers noted that members had the opportunity to review the minutes from the June 16, 2020 meeting which were posted on the private side of the website prior to the meeting and asked for a motion to approve them.

Motion to approve the minutes from the June 16, 2020 meeting as submitted

Motion: Brewster. **Seconded:** Bart. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** Piraino. **Aye Votes:** 14, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

II. 2019-2020 School Safety and Security Grant Update

Mr. Myers provided an update on the progress in moving these applications along to awarded. Of the 134 competitive grant applications, 80, or 60%, have been approved and awarded. On the meritorious side, 88%, equaling 442 of the 500 grant applications, have been awarded. In total, of the \$60 million available, \$42.6 million has been awarded to school entities. Those that remain unawarded are mostly related to either clarification needed from the school or the pending review of their recently provided information.

III. Status Update on COVID-19 School Health and Safety Grants

Mr. Myers reported that 775 applications were received, of which 134 have been awarded. The initial review of all 775 applications was finished just before this meeting, and staff are now working through the details. He acknowledged that this has been a team effort and recognized the work of most of the accounting team and some program staff to get through the initial review. Based on the limited spending window, PCCD prioritized getting through the applications as quickly as possible. He anticipated that after today staff will be able to continue to push these applications to awarded status.

Out of the overall group of eligible schools, Mr. Myers reported that four charter schools and one school district did not submit applications. He noted that the one school district, Bryn Athyn, is not really operational though it is included in the eligible pool. Staff will continue trying to engage the four charter schools so they will submit applications and will update the Committee on their progress.

Mr. Myers informed Committee members that since the last meeting in June, a new charter school requested funds to support their preparation efforts for the 2020-21 school year. Catalyst Academy in Allegheny County requested \$89,728 for cleaning supplies, social distancing resources, and counseling services for students showing signs of trauma. They were not part of the initial applicant pool as they did not officially become a charter school until July 1. They were allowed to apply but were informed that since they were not part of the previously approved list, Committee approval would be needed before their application could be finalized. PCCD recommends approval of their request, as there is sufficient funding available based on the Bryn Athyn school district not providing application.

Motion to approve the Catalyst Academy application for funding through the 2020 COVID-19 School Health and Safety Grants in the amount of \$89,728

Motion: Bullock. **Seconded:** Tuleya-Payne. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** Piraino. **Aye Votes:** 14, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

Mr. Myers stated that PCCD staff will let Catalyst Academy know that their application can be finalized. A member asked for clarification that this grant funding is part of the federal CARES act and is non-competitive. Mr. Myers confirmed that assertion, noting that there was clear guidance in the legislation regarding what could be included in the application to be accepted.

IV. COVID-19 Disaster Emergency Targeted Health and Safety Grants for 2020-2021 School Year (Nonpublic Schools)

Mr. Myers provided context for the discussion on these grant funds, directing attention to the summary provided in the meeting materials of the response received to the announcement of \$7.5 million being available to Intermediate Units (IUs) to support non-public schools. He gave the reminder that these are state funds and the maximum amount that any one non-public school can be awarded is \$10,000.

Mr. Myers reported that PCCD received applications from all 29 IUs for a total requested amount of \$8.794 million. The compiled grant executive summaries document includes the names of all 889 non-public school entities that requested funding, which combined with the 29 IUs totals 918 listed school entities.

Mr. Myers noted that the Act 30 legislation indicated that this Committee has the discretion to determine how the resources would be allocated. There was initial concern that the request for these funds would be dramatically higher than the amount available. Since the total request was only \$8.8 million, PCCD believes that it is important to attempt to support every entity that made a request. Mr. Myers shared PCCD's recommendation that all the requested amounts be reduced by approximately 15%. Mr. Myers presented a chart showing what the IUs initially submitted and the recommended reduced amount of what they would receive. The prorated amount would apply equally to every entity in each request, to both the non-public schools and the IU.

Mr. Myers shared an interesting nuance in these grant requests, that for-profit schools were included in 18 of the 29 IU applications, with their requests comprising \$715,000 of the total amount. He noted that PCCD staff did some research as they were initially unsure of how to handle the for-profit school entities, resulting in the recommendation that the for-profit school entities remain included in the requests, as they meet the definition and may have as significant a need as the other school entities. A member concurred, commenting that the 85% funding is a fair way to do it, and that even for-profit schools need to be safe.

Motion to award \$7.5 million to the 29 Intermediate Units to support the 889 non-public schools that made application, with each school receiving an equal pro-rated reduction to their requested amount

Motion: Hurley. **Seconded:** Ross. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 15, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

Mr. Myers concluded this discussion by mentioning the issue of Right to Know requests and the limitations that are normally associated with responses to these requests. The typical protocol and expectation is that all grants are posted and made publicly available on the Department of the Treasury website. School safety and security grant applications have been historically and legislatively somewhat protected in the Right to Know Law, and information that would reveal a potential security vulnerability is redacted before the awarded information is made accessible via the Treasury website. Mr. Myers pointed out that the COVID-19 grants don't reveal that type of security risk, so PCCD plans to post them as normal to the Treasury website. No questions or concerns were raised by Committee members to this plan of action.

V. Discussion of Community Violence Prevention/Reduction Grant Framework for FY 2020-21

Mr. Myers informed Committee members of the desire to engage in discussion on how to move this program forward overall. He reviewed the summary document provided in the meeting materials, including a history over the past two years of utilizing this funding to award nearly \$15 million in grants, using a regional scoring model to review and approve 54 applications supporting projects in 27 counties. Mr. Myers reminded participants that municipalities, institutions of higher education and community-based organizations were eligible to apply for a maximum of \$350,000 in 2018-19 and \$300,000 in 2019-20 to fund projects for up to two-years that addressed five items/activities allowed by Act 44 related to community violence and trauma.

Mr. Myers stated that this year's budget includes \$7.5 million for this program and shared PCCD's recommendation to reconvene the Community Violence Prevention/Reduction Workgroup to develop and make recommendations to prioritize grants for communities that have the greatest need for community violence prevention resources. Mr. Myers reviewed the proposed focus of the Workgroup, including:

- How to prioritize funding for projects serving communities and municipalities (including counties) in Pennsylvania with the highest rates of violence and need;
- Explore the possible use of data elements (e.g., Uniform Crime Report offenses data) to assist us gauging levels of violence and need across the Commonwealth;
- Whether to restrict funding for programs or interventions that are evidence-based or evidence-informed; noted interest in supporting home-grown projects as well as those that have been thoroughly vetted
- How the SSSC should ensure geographic distribution while working to support those communities with the most significant needs; and
- Review current maximum award amounts and whether a tiered approach could be utilized based on the activity and/or the population to be served.

Mr. Myers anticipates that the Workgroup would convene at least twice to deliberate and would present their findings and recommendations to the Committee at the August 26, 2020 meeting. These recommendations would inform the development of a Funding Announcement and Scoring Rubric for the FY 2020-21 Community Violence Prevention/Reduction Initiative, scheduled for release in September 2020.

Mr. Myers invited Committee members to share any thoughts or concerns in using this approach to move forward with the following response.

- Referencing the concepts of evidence-based or evidence-informed, one member stated that she would be fine with the lower threshold of the latter, particularly for local efforts, but noted the importance of having at least that minimum standard. She also wondered if there is concern that less effective or non-evidence-based programs might not be considered and suggested a requirement for data to be collected for short and/or intermediate outcomes that could be used to evaluate success or lack thereof.
- Another member wanted to ensure that applicants have an open line of communication with the school district as a participant and not be just municipality-focused and/or overlook the school district's needs.
- A member followed up with the suggestion to add a requirement for the school district to sign off on the application to ensure that it's a collaborative effort. Mr. Myers responded that we want to make sure the type of program warrants that kind of requirement before asking for such a statement.

Mr. Myers concluded by stating that Committee members are welcomed and encouraged to be part of this workgroup and to let staff know of their interest.

VI. General Updates

School Safety Program Manager Ms. Carol Kuntz provided updates on the various workgroups and other activities underway. She stated that the Assessment Criteria Workgroups have met several times and will be reconvening in August to review the tiered approach documents developed by the groups.

Regarding the assessors, Ms. Kuntz informed participants that while there have not been any newly approved assessors for their review, there are some in the works that have sent in applications.

Ms. Kuntz shared that the School Safety Survey Workgroup will be convening in August. With the current evolving COVID-19 situation, she related the recommendation that the Committee change the survey timeframe to the winter (December/January) and review the presented results in February. Changing the timing would also align closer to the budget season for both schools and the General Assembly. Committee members strongly supported this recommendation, responding that it's very appropriate given the current environment, particularly since some districts will not hold school in person until after the first semester.

Ms. Kuntz gave an update on the coordinator report collection. She stated that as of July 24, 472 school safety and security coordinators from 348 school districts, 68 charter schools, 37 Area Vocational Technical Schools, 18 Intermediate Units and one Approved Private School had notified PCCD that their annual security reports had been presented to their local school board in accordance with the requirements of Act 44.

Regarding the ongoing development of NASRO and equivalent training, Ms. Kuntz announced that six providers of NASRO-equivalent training have been approved thus far. She shared that Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) has developed an online version and conducted a test run with a group of five School Resource Officers (SROs), School Police Officers (SPOs), and School Security Guards (SSGs). The results indicated that the program interaction and narrative content were insufficient compared to the in-person classroom setting and some aspects were being missed. IUP will enhance the content and narration of the module and will conduct discussion meetings weekly with the participants to monitor comprehension. IUP will also create a rubric to be completed after each session. Ms. Kuntz stated that the modifications are looking good and noted that the content is based on PA law.

A member asked if there were any relative comparisons to the protocols regarding use of force policies to ensure that there is some alignment and consistency with the six providers, especially given the current environment, such as the protocol and response to students, parent or others not wearing masks. Ms. Kuntz responded that it has been done at a higher level, though not to that level of specificity, but can go back and look at that with the providers. She noted that one of the main standards is on de-escalation and stated that the six providers are also looking at what's going on in the current environment and how to make their programs better and more responsive, particularly with COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, addressing inequities, how to deal with people, etc.

PCCD Executive Policy Manager Ms. Sam Koch provided an update on the Threat Assessment Team Training. She was excited to inform participants that just last week federal partners notified PCCD that the revised agency and subrecipient budget modifications were accepted and officially approved for the PCCD's STOP School Violence Threat Assessment Grant. Implementation activities in collaboration with RSM Corporation, the entity selected to design and deliver technical assistance and training supports for school entities, can now begin. With the coronavirus pandemic, the development of project activities was delayed, and the delivery of online and in-person training programs was pushed back until early 2021. An initial planning

and kick-off meeting is anticipated for later in August. The Committee will be kept apprised of the progress made.

VII. Member Updates/Comments/Questions

A member had a question about the distribution of COVID-19 grants and funds. Mr. Myers replied that PCCD is working on processing the applications as quickly as possible and getting the funding out to schools. He related that the process was simplified, so it's mostly a review of eligibility requirements and ensuring that the right documents have been signed, and the approvals are moving along.

Another member asked if the funds were being made available on a reimbursable basis or if there is up-front money available. Mr. Myers confirmed that the funds will be advanced to school entities, as a lot of the usual federal guidelines and requirements don't apply. He cautioned that it will be complicated if the funds are not spent and have to be returned to the federal government. He noted that it's a tight turn-around but are working through the details with schools. The member emphasized the need to be clear that funds must be expended by 10/31 and not carried over into later in the year. Mr. Myers concurred, noting that the project modification process has been refined enabling it to be turned around more quickly.

VIII. Public Comment

There was no public comment offered.

IX. Executive Session

Motion to enter Executive Session in order to review the Pennsylvania State Police RVAT report

Motion: Brewster. **Seconded:** Hurley. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 15, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

Motion to conclude Executive Session and return to regular session

Motion: Bart. **Seconded:** Evanchock. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 15, **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**

X. Adjournment

Mr. Myers reminded participants of the next meeting date of August 26, 2020 from 1:00 to 2:00 PM. He thanked everyone for their participation and for providing any feedback to the work to be prepared for the August 26 meeting. Following the vote, the meeting adjourned at 2:07 PM.

Motion to adjourn

Motion: Hein. **Seconded:** Ross. **Abstentions:** None. **Not Present for Vote:** None. **Aye Votes:** 15; **Nay Votes:** 0. **Motion Adopted**