

Press Release

Wednesday, January 29, 2014

Governor Mary Fallin Announces Comprehensive Plan to Improve School Safety and Security

Constitutional Amendment Allows Every School District to Build Safe Rooms or Pursue other Safety and Security Needs

OKLAHOMA CITY – Governor Mary Fallin today announced her support of a comprehensive plan to improve school safety and security. At today's Associated Press Legislative Forum, Fallin asked legislators to pass House Joint Resolution 1092, a Constitutional Amendment allowing every school district to pursue a one-time increase in bonding capacity to fund upgrades like storm shelters, safe rooms, and precautions against active shooters.

"I am the governor of this state, and I am also a mother," said Fallin. "Nothing is more important to me than the safety of our children. I'm asking lawmakers in both parties to work with me this session to support a Constitutional Amendment giving each school district the tools it needs to protect young Oklahomans from tornadoes, shooters, and other threats."

Fallin said the state must take a two-step process to improving safety at Oklahoma schools. First, it needs to evaluate current safety needs. To accomplish that, the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is offering ongoing voluntary school safety assessments. The assessments provide recommendations regarding potential safety upgrades.

"Oklahoma has over 1800 schools, and each has its own unique needs. Some of these buildings already have safe rooms and may want to pursue other safety upgrades to prevent against things like school shootings," said Fallin. "Others may be better served by retrofitting hallways or gymnasiums than building entirely new safe rooms or shelters. Every school has different needs and concerns, and the evaluation process allows us to best identify those needs."

The next step, said Fallin, is identifying a way to pay for those upgrades. HJR 1092 offers a revenue source to local school districts by allowing them to pursue bonds over their current limit for the purpose of upgrading school safety and security. Each school district could submit to the people of that area a ballot question that would provide funds for capital expenditures for severe weather and safety projects.

HJR 1092 is a proposed Constitutional amendment that must be first passed by the Legislature and then passed by voters in the November 2014 election.

HJR 1092 was authored by State Representative Mark McBride (R-Moore) and State Representative Jon Echols (R-Oklahoma City). Both lawmakers represent areas devastated by last year's May storms.

"My constituents lost loved ones, lost homes, and lost businesses in last year's tornadoes," said McBride. "Part of the healing process for my community is to make sure that every area of the state is doing all they can to protect Oklahoma school children. I'm proud to be working on legislation that accomplishes that goal."

Echols said HJR 1092 gives local districts the flexibility they need to pursue the best solutions.

"Every school can do more to protect our kids, but a one-size-fits-all solution isn't the answer," said Echols. "This plan empowers local school boards and parents to pursue local strategies to keep their children safe and their schools secure. This is a smart, responsible plan that we believe will save lives."