



SUMMER STEPHAN DISTRICT ATTORNEY, SAN DIEGO COUNTY

June 27, 2019

The Honorable Brian Babin, U.S. Representative
U.S. House of Representatives
316 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES 838 (BABIN) – SUPPORT

Dear Congressman Babin:

The Office of the San Diego County District Attorney is pleased to support your efforts outlined in H.R. 838, the Threat Assessment, Prevention, and Safety Act of 2019 (TAPS). We applaud the goals of this proposal, which will identify and mitigate threats in order to counter targeted violence in our communities. As the District Attorney for the second largest DA's office in the state of California and fifth largest in the U.S., the prevention of targeted threats of violence is a priority. We have implemented processes very much aligned with the TAPS Act that have contributed to successful interventions in high threat situations targeting our schools. Knowing the benefits that the TAPS Act can provide for the safety of communities across our country, we stand ready to support the effort in any way we can.

With the increased usage of anonymized software applications, threats against locations such as schools have increased. Whether such threats are legitimate or not, they have had an enormous negative impact on the community. School threats have grown to be more prevalent through recent years. Since 2015, our Office has reviewed 111 school threats in San Diego County and has prosecuted 66 of those cases. In the weeks following the 2018 Parkland, Florida high school shooting, the San Diego Unified School District reported 43 new school threats. According to the superintendent, the increased number in school threats has cost the district loss in staff time, money and more importantly instructional time. One threat alone resulted in a 60-percent drop in school attendance, and 125 hours of overtime for school police to thoroughly investigate the threat. To understand the risk posed by school threats, we need systems to monitor and prevent targeted violence from occurring in the first place. It is through measures like these that our effort to protect students and the community is fulfilled.

Due to this rapid increase of threats of targeted violence on school grounds made by juveniles in our county, our office, in collaboration with the San Diego County Office of Education, law enforcement agencies, and mental health professionals, created a comprehensive School Threat Protocol. The protocol includes three separate coordinated responses: school, law enforcement, and prosecution. A critical component to the protocol is the School Threat Assessment Team (STAT) which is comprised of deputy district attorneys, law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, and educators. STAT meets on a regular basis to review individuals who pose a significant risk to public safety. The multi-disciplinary team utilizes their diverse expertise to create an action plan for the juvenile that focuses on public safety as well as rehabilitation. This

team has been instrumental in cases where legal challenges prevent the filing of criminal charges, but the threat posed by the individual is significant and needs to be addressed. Our experience tells us that the TAPS Act is a much-needed tool to systemize efforts throughout the United States in order to protect communities. We would be honored to assist with educating about the importance of TAPS. Our positive experiences have proven that threat assessment strategies work to reduce targeted violence.

The TAPS Act recognizes threat assessment and management processes must become part of the culture and fabric of contemporary law enforcement. This legislation will standardize and provide a threat assessment and management process across the federal government. Furthermore, it will provide all states, on a voluntary basis, the training, resources, and support needed to stand up community-based, multi-disciplinary threat assessment and management units.

It will require the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to implement a national strategy to prevent targeted violence through threat assessment and management strategies programs. H.R. 838 is a sound solution that will support a process of identifying, investigating, accessing and mitigating threats to targeted violence. Overall, we believe that this measure will be beneficial not only for San Diego County and California, but to our nation as a whole.

On behalf of the Office of the San Diego County District Attorney and a grateful community, we would like to thank you for authoring this legislative proposal.

If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Director, Gail Stewart at (619) 895-0327.

Sincerely,



Summer Stephan
San Diego County District Attorney

Cc: Stephen Janushkowsky, Legislative Director, Office of Congressman Babin