

**Testimony of Sheriff Timothy C. Carter  
before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime,  
Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations on  
“Preventable Violence in America: An Examination of Law  
Enforcement Information Sharing and Misguided Public  
Policy”**

**20 March 2018**

**Sheriff Timothy C. Carter  
Shenandoah County Sheriff’s Office  
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Woodstock, Virginia**

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Sub-Committee Chairman Sensenbrenner, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and Members of the Committee, my name is Timothy Carter and I am the Sheriff of Shenandoah County, Virginia which is located in the northern Shenandoah Valley of the Commonwealth of Virginia. I have been given the privilege through election by the people of Shenandoah County to serve for four terms as their County Sheriff. Prior to this opportunity, I was appointed for eight years as the Chief Deputy of the Shenandoah County Sheriff’s Office. I began my law enforcement career in 1986 as a Police Officer in the Town of Blackstone, Virginia. Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today regarding an “Examination of Law Enforcement Information Sharing and Misguided Public Policy.”

Since my career has been in local and predominately rural law enforcement, I work hard to maintain a connection with the people that I and my staff serve. The people of my community expect their law enforcement agencies to protect them and work within the resources that they provide. They expect these same law enforcement agencies to reflect the community standards and culture.

Shenandoah County is like many other rural counties with limited resources and a commitment to protect and serve the public. Many years ago, after the school shooting in Columbine, our Office, as all other law enforcement agencies, our training, incident response, and critical incident pre-planning changed for school shooting incidents. The standards for training were primarily dictated by the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Department of Criminal Justice Services, but also response, supervision, and management of critical incidents including school shootings as our Command staff learned and

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developed by attending and researching best practices from other agencies, including those who had a history of such events.

This training and pre-planning for such events is a continual process, and in Shenandoah County, immediately after the Sandy Hook, CT incident, we experienced a disruption in a Shenandoah County school which coincidentally has the same name, Sandy Hook Elementary School. The School Superintendent and I held community school safety forums after our event to gather public input on how to improve school safety, over and above what had been provided.

The two prevailing themes of public sentiment from parents and school staff was that there needed to be facility security improvements like controlled access into each school and camera system upgrades or installations, and secondly there was an outcry to increase our law enforcement presence in each school. At the time, there was no control access, except for a sign directing visitors to the main office when entering. Also, at the time there were school resource officers assigned to the three Shenandoah County campuses, but not to each school.

Since these forums, the Shenandoah County Sheriff’s Office and the Shenandoah County School Board have been working together to fund these initiatives. The case for facility improvements is complicated in that our local County Board of Supervisors must approve such expenditures, that process is ongoing, and must be balanced with educational capital needs and other critical infrastructure needs. I believe the need for funding is the primary challenge here. I ask that you continue to provide assistance through federal funding as a

consideration in this area, understanding that these types of improvements are costly capital and infrastructure expenditures

From a staffing perspective, the Shenandoah County Sheriff’s Office and the governing body, or the Shenandoah County Board of Supervisors agree to fund the necessary additional Deputy Sheriffs to assign a certified law enforcement School Resource Officer to each public school. After we received approval from the U.S. Department of Justice Asset Forfeiture Money Laundering Section (AFMLS), Equitable Sharing funds were used to initiate this effort, while the county gradually took over total funding at the end of a five (5) year period. The results were nine (9) full time staff and one (1) part time staff member assigned to nine (9) public schools, and one (1) public technical school.

Not only were we able to complete this initiative and comply with the public demand for increased and improved school security, we were able to bring the command and control of our law enforcement school resource officer into one organization, the Shenandoah County Sheriff’s Office. Having continuity of school security is critical. Prior to this initiative we had three (3) different law enforcement agencies assigned to different schools in our school division. Having all of the school resource officer under the same command and control has many advantages, primarily consistency and continuity of school staff, and school related incidents, investigations, and responses.

Certainly we train on our active shooter response and work with other county law enforcement agencies through mutual aid, as well as with the Virginia State Police. We critique our crisis pre-planning each year

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and keep it up-to-date with the Shenandoah County school administrators. These plans are used by all responding law enforcement agencies, as well as other emergency service providers.

My experience with providing law enforcement services in our local school system begins with information sharing outside of traditional law enforcement data bases, which came in effect in the late 90’s as my county approved a records management system that connected my Office with the town police departments. This initiative needed federal grant funding to start, plus a willingness of the various agencies, including the Sheriff’s Office to share criminal reports, as a tool for criminal investigations. Each organization signed a written Memorandum of Understanding to agree to share information and maintenance costs, while one cornerstone of the agreement which still remains today is that each agency still owns their data, even though it is stored with the Shenandoah County Sheriff’s Office. This agreement extends to our county Communications Center, in that many of the calls originate through dispatch. Again, accessing national and state databases for information sharing is critical, but having a local system that local agencies can access and share information is just as critical when dealing with local characters, known criminals, people in crisis, etc.

There are times when a student, family member, or a staff member are in crisis and these incidents are shared between agencies and jurisdictions. We work extremely hard to create an environment where intervention is possible with the person before any aggression or violence occurs. Having a cooperative agreement and records sharing system promotes this environment with agency information flow.

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Certified law enforcement assigned to each school, promote this environment with personal contact with students, families, and staff.

Our records management system was initiated with federal grant funding. Finally, our law enforcement Deputy Sheriffs were initiated originally with federal grant funding through the Federal Universal Hiring Program, then as stated, expanded through Equitable Sharing funds and local funding after Sandy Hook. Federal grant programs in these areas are critical to enhancing school safety and security, I ask that you continue these programs, and even consider increased federal funding.

Sub-Committee Chairman Sensenbrenner, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, committee members, thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to talk with you today. I appreciate the service that you provide to your communities and the work that you do for our Country. If you ever have the time and opportunity to take a drive about an hour west of the Capital, please visit the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. Certainly know that you are all welcome in Shenandoah County, Virginia. Thank you.