Dept. of Justice: Speak Up, Speak Out tip line celebrates countless successes in advance of two-year anniversary

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of School Safety (OSS) will mark the two-year anniversary of the launch of the Speak Up, Speak Out Resource Center (SUSO) on September 1, 2022. SUSO is a comprehensive, one-stop place to turn with important concerns, offering a Threat Reporting System, Threat Assessment Consultation, Critical Incident Response and General School Safety Guidance.

"Over the past two years, SUSO has helped keep students in Wisconsin safe," said Attorney General Josh Kaul. "With state funding, we can keep this successful program in place for years to come."

Since its inception, the SUSO tip line has aided 438 different Wisconsin schools with at least one tip. Between September 1, 2021, and August 17, 2022, SUSO contacted 229 different Wisconsin schools regarding a potential tip. In the same time frame, SUSO delivered at least one tip to 74 different law enforcement agencies. The most common tip category in the past year has been bullying.

OSS was initially supported by more than $2 million in federal grant funding from the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance. OSS is currently supported by more than $1.8 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding which will end in December of 2023. DOJ will be requesting the legislature permanently fund OSS in the next biennial budget.

As the two-year anniversary approaches, schools around the state are sharing their experience using SUSO:

"In late May of this year, we had two credible threats made that SUSO helped bring to our attention or manage.

In one case, a student used SUSO to report another student threatening to shoot several classmates during school the next day. Within 45 minutes of the tip coming in we had two detectives and the school resource officer in the office following up on the tip and the school administrators were developing a response plan for the next day. About three hours after the tip came in, the detectives had made contact with the suspect and the suspect's family. The next day the original tipster approached the school resource officer and the principal which led to additional information and ultimately a search warrant on the suspect's house.

Two weeks later during class a different student showed a classmate a "hit list" and began speaking about shooting up the school. The classmate used SUSO to report the threat and within a few minutes the threatening student was isolated, and police were at the school to investigate and provide extra security. In the following days there were additional tips made about the threat. Some had additional information while others were about the original threat. SUSO provided a common point for the reports which made it easier to manage."

-Michael Kendall, School Resource Officer

Superior Police Department

"River Bluff Middle School in Stoughton rolled out the SUSO program to our students in the spring of 2021. The program was very beneficial in that it gave our students and parents the opportunity to reach out to us 24/7 with any concerns or threats that needed to be communicated right away. One example of an incident is we had a student report that they were concerned for the well being of a friend that was making comments on social media late at night that they were considering suicide. The student immediately logged on to the app and shared this concern at 12:30 am. The message was immediately sent out to our building Principal, myself as the Associate Principal, the Chief of Police and members of our counseling team. We were very easily able to communicate with the person who made the report and get the student of concern the help they needed almost immediately. I believe that if we had not had this program, we would have potentially come to school the next

day having to deal with a real tragedy. There have been a couple of other incidents in which our students have used the program, but this is I believe the best example of its importance."

-Dan Holzhuter, Associate Principal River Bluff Middle School

Stoughton Area School District

"When we first started using SUSO we were getting reports of vaping and some minor bullying incidents. But it didn't take long for students to start reporting serious concerns such as abuse, mental health concerns for friends, students with weapons and suicidal thoughts. While all calls have led to actions, I do believe the reports of suicidal thoughts and weapons have been our most important connections. As we know, many students tell peers about serious issues before they tell trusted adults. In one case in particular, the report from our student involved texts from another student who was out of state. The student was able to take screen shots of the texts which included suicidal statements and comments about drugs the student was taking. Our local law enforcement contacted law enforcement from another state to locate the teen and do a welfare check. This is just one example of something SUSO provides for our school community to keep our students safe."

-Mike Altekruse, Mental Health Coordinator

Neenah Joint School District

"The SUSO program is an important resource for students, families, and school staff in that it helps all involved find the correct resources for a given situation. It also creates an appropriate venue for students to report their concerns 24/7/365 as well as a mechanism that will address their concerns in a timely manner. SUSO helps to fill an important gap in student/family reporting of school safety concerns in that the website or app are always available, staffed, and ready to assist students, families, and the community. I have found the SUSO analysts to be highly skilled and exceptionally well trained in completing the reporting process and getting accurate information to the correct stakeholders, whether that be schools, community resources, or law enforcement.

In addition, SUSO addresses the need for a secure, confidential reporting mechanism that all students and families can access easily."

-Marc Lehnerer, Director of Student Services

Schools District of Waukesha

"SUSO has enabled our students to share concerns regarding peers leading to our staff checking in and supporting those students that are demonstrating concerning behavior and others in the situation. It has allowed us to follow through with our promise to keep our school environment safe and show our community that school safety is a priority."

-Hope Cameron, Dean of Students – Horace Mann

Wausau School District

"With SUSO, we have a reassurance that there is someone helping us monitor the tips as they come in and have quick action to respond. The SUSO team then offers resources and suggestions to respond to the person sending in the tip. This quick action eases the minds of all those involved from the tipster to the respondents.

Above and beyond just answering tip, the SUSO program offers districts help on Threat Assessment Consultation, Critical Incident Response, Threat Reporting and overall General School Safety Guidance. SUSO not only helps our district identify threats of violence, but it also empowers our students, staff, and community to seek out help with other issues such as hate/ bias, bullying, depression, suicidal thoughts, drug use, self-harm and much more."

-Scott Johnson, Buildings and Grounds Manager/Safety Coordinator

La Crosse School District

Students, parents, school staff, or any community members can submit a school safety concern or threat via the SUSO website, mobile phone application, or toll-free number.

SUSO Reports can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

Online at speakup.widoj.gov
1-800-MY-SUSO-1 (1-800-697-8761)
Mobile app (iOS/Android)
Learn more about the SPEAK UP, SPEAK OUT Resource Center here.

View the press release here.