

# Dept. of Justice: Attorney General Kaul urges legislators to fund office of school safety

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MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Josh Kaul today is urging Wisconsin legislators to reverse the Joint Committee on Finance refusal to fund the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of School Safety (OSS) and ensure the office is able to continue its current, lifesaving operations to keep Wisconsin kids safe. Since its inception in 2018, OSS has become a critical resource for students, teachers, school administrators, and educational communities across the state of Wisconsin implementing practices proven to prevent violence in schools.

OSS staff provide trainings that follow national best practices related to crisis prevention and response, free of charge, to any Wisconsin school that requests it. They also developed and maintain critical incident response teams for every region of Wisconsin, and they established and run the Speak Up, Speak Out Resource Center, including the 24-hour tipline. OSS has also distributed nearly \$100 million in grants for safety enhancements, threat assessment training, and mental health training to public, private, charter, and tribal schools throughout Wisconsin.

“The Office of School Safety has become a critical part of the work being done in Wisconsin to keep our schools safe,” said Attorney General Josh Kaul. “Dismantling that office and cutting key services it provides would be a major step backwards for school safety in Wisconsin.”

## **Speak Up, Speak Out**

On September 1, 2020, OSS launched Speak Up, Speak Out (SUSO), a 24/7 statewide confidential reporting system free to all Wisconsin schools. 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. SUSO aims to promote the reporting of concerns before violence happens.

## **SUSO Fast Facts**

- More than 1,700 schools and law enforcement agencies in Wisconsin have received at least one tip from SUSO since its inception.
- To date, SUSO has received more than 7,000 contacts, with half of those coming in the 2022-2023 school year alone.
- Between May of 2022 and May of 2023, 63 of Wisconsin's 72 counties received at least one SUSO tip.
- Schools around the state have stopped paying private companies to provide services like SUSO and switched to use this free statewide tool. Without it, schools will have to spend tens of thousands of dollars for private services.

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 [widoj.gov](https://widoj.gov)
- 1-800-MY-SUSO-1 (1-800-697-8761)
- Mobile app ([iOS](#)/[Android](#))

## **OSS Training**

OSS staff are certified to train a variety of courses that follow national best practices related to violence prevention, protection, mitigation, crisis response and recovery. OSS offers these trainings free of charge to any school or law enforcement agency in Wisconsin that requests it. Trainings offered in Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) equip school and law enforcement staff with the knowledge, protocol and model practices needed to determine if someone poses a threat to their school and how to intervene effectively based on the level of concern posed. Crisis Intervention trainings equip school staff to respond effectively when a crisis event occurs in a way that will promote psychological recovery for all staff and students. Other trainings help school staff establish standardized response and

reunification for any school crisis, from fires and floods to acts of violence. OSS staff continue to expand the trainings offered to ensure that Wisconsin schools have a comprehensive toolkit to help keep kids and school staff safe.

School shootings are preventable. Two practices are proven to prevent school violence: an accessible, effective threat reporting system and BTAM. OSS leads the state in bringing both the practices to school.

### **OSS Training Fast Facts**

- Between May of 2022 and May of 2023, OSS staff provided trainings and presentations in 63 of Wisconsin's 72 counties.
- Between May of 2022 and May of 2023, OSS staff reached 5,837 people through trainings and presentations around the state.

### **Critical Incident Response Teams**

In 2022, OSS established and trained twelve Critical Incident Response Teams (CIRTs) around the state. CIRTs are designed to provide all Wisconsin K-12 public, private, charter and tribal schools with access to a regionally based team to support them if a critical incident ever occurs at their school. Each CIRT is made up of volunteers who are part of a multi-disciplinary team. These teams include law enforcement officers, school administrators, counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, teachers, school safety experts, and representatives from other related professions. The mission of the CIRT program is to minimize the psychological impact of a school critical incident; provide resources to help stabilize the school community; work to identify individuals that may require long-term mental health services after a critical incident occurs; and offer support to school administrators and educators. Wisconsin is the first state to implement regionally based CIRTs on a statewide basis. Additional training academies are being held this summer, adding team members across the state.

### **CIR Fast Facts**

- Between June of 2022 and May of 2023, OSS provided evidence-based crisis response and intervention training to 191 participants at regional CIR training academies, ensuring access to best practices across the state.
- Between May of 2022 and May of 2023, OSS provided 71 instances of CIR support and resources to schools that were impacted by a traumatic incident,

helping them recover and return to learning more quickly.

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. Without additional funding, the critical services provided by OSS will cease to exist. Wisconsin DOJ has requested the legislature permanently fund OSS in the next biennial budget.

View this press release on the Wisconsin Department of Justice website [here](#).