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Letter on school safety  
From Speaker Jon Burns  
September 12, 2024

As we continue to uplift the entire Barrow County community, we recognize that there is still more work to be done. While House Republicans have already made significant investments to strengthen security in our schools, increase access to mental healthcare, and keep our students safe, I am committed to not only continuing this work but pursuing additional policies that help ensure a tragedy like this never happens in our state again.

**First**, we will consider measures to implement mandatory participation in statewide student mental health and behavior monitoring services that foster inter-agency communication between school systems, behavioral health professionals, and law enforcement. We are aware that a breakdown in communication between school systems and law enforcement officials allowed the shooter's prior history to slip through the cracks upon his transfer to Apalachee High School. We must ensure our schools have the tools they need to coordinate resources for students who require mental health intervention.

**Second**, we will take steps to continue expanding access to mental healthcare for every Georgian, particularly our teens and young adults in schools across the state. It is evident that the student who committed this atrocity had long suffered from mental health issues. We owe it to our children to ensure they have every opportunity to receive treatment when needed.

**Third**, we will evaluate new systems and technologies that may be utilized to detect the presence of firearms before they enter a school building. Investing in infrastructure to continue securing our schools will be integral in preventing future tragedies.

**Fourth**, we will seek to increase penalties for making terroristic threats in our schools—and make it clear that here in Georgia, threats of violence against our students will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. In the days following the events at Apalachee, numerous “copycat” threats were reported and investigated in school systems throughout Georgia. We cannot allow these irresponsible and unsubstantiated threats to divert valuable time and resources from local law enforcement and school resource officers.

**Fifth**, we will reintroduce legislation that incentivizes safe storage and encourages law-abiding citizens to properly secure their firearms and obtain gun safety training. Simple measures such as storing guns in lockboxes or equipping firearms with trigger locks has the ability to save lives.

This is far from an exhaustive list. As the 2025 session approaches, we will continue having conversations about implementing common-sense policies that take steps toward securing the safety and well-being of Georgia’s students. As the facts of this tragic incident are further revealed, it will be our priority to ensure we properly examine every reasonable idea and solution to protect and defend the most vulnerable among us—our children—while also protecting the right and privilege of our citizens to protect their families and property.

I ask that each of you continue to join Dayle and me in praying for Barrow County as we work together toward making our state stronger and safer for every family.

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