

# **SAFE TO TELL ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

Senate Bill 338 which established the Safe to Tell Initiative in Nevada was first heard by the Senate Committee on Education on March 17, 2015. Testimony during that hearing and later hearings focused on the need for an initiative in Nevada that would empower young people to become actively engaged in school and community safety. The bill was introduced by Senator Debbie Smith, a long-time advocate of school safety and suicide prevention. In her testimony, Senator Smith described the recent suicide of a middle school student in Fallon which inspired her once again to do more than was being done to help create a safety net for our students. Safe to Tell was developed to provide an easy mechanism for Nevadans to anonymously report violent, unlawful, or threatening activities about which they are aware, so that caring adults can respond and react to prevent or intervene appropriately.

According to Susan Payne, founder of the Colorado Safe2Tell Initiative who also testified at the hearings held during the 2015 Session of the Nevada Legislature, "Young people need to know when they see their friends struggling that there is help and hope and adults willing to respond. The goal is to ensure that all students, parents, teachers, and community members have a safe and anonymous way to report concerns about their safety or the safety of others."

On May 21, 2015, Senate Bill 338 which embodied an initiative to accomplish the goals recommended by the Bystander Report passed the Senate unanimously with 20 in support and no opposition. On May 30, 2015, the bill passed the Assembly with 35 in support and 6 in opposition. Governor Brian Sandoval signed the bill into law on June 10, 2015.

Senator Debbie Smith was a strong supporter of Senate Bill 338 and the Safe to Tell initiative. She was named as an original member of the Advisory Committee. Sadly, she passed away in February 2016 before she could see the implementation of Safe to Tell as the safety net envisioned for Nevada students, families, and communities.

## **Research and Best Practices**

The Safe to Tell initiative is based on research and best practice recommendations from a series of respected national publications, including a study completed in May 2008 conducted jointly by the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education—"Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack." This report, like several others before it, echoed the conclusion that "perpetrators

exhibited concerning behavior prior to the attack in 93% of the incidents” and “at least one other person had some type of knowledge of the attacker’s plan in 81% of the incidents and more than one person had such knowledge in 59% of the incidents. Of those individuals who had prior knowledge, 93% were peers of the perpetrators—friends, schoolmates, or siblings.”

These were the primary recommendations included in that report which has become known as the Bystander Report:

1. *Schools should ensure a climate in which students feel comfortable sharing information they have regarding a potentially threatening situation with a responsible adult.*
2. *School districts are encouraged to develop policies that address the many aspects of reporting a threat.*
3. *Teachers, administrators, and other faculty should be trained on how to respond to students who provide them with information about a threatening situation, as well as how to deal with actual threats.*

The Bystander Report concludes with this statement:

*This study also highlights the importance of a school climate where adults encourage students to come forward with information about threats and other concerning behavior, without fearing punishment, ridicule or not being taken seriously. All communities should develop school policies and practices to ensure students come forward when they have information about a threat or possible attack.*

More recently in December 2015, in the “Report on the Arapahoe High School Shooting: Lessons Learned on Information Sharing, Threat Assessment, and Systems Integrity,” we note the findings of the Center for the Study of Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and the Department of Criminal Justice, University of Northern Colorado as well as citizen participants in the project. The report cites these conclusions:

*The three major failures in information sharing included:*

1. *A failure to use the student information system (e.g., Infinite Campus) to document behavioral and safety concerns (e.g., threat risk, academic, discipline response);*
2. *A failure to train students and staff in an anonymous reporting system (e.g., Safe2Tell); and*
3. *A failure to implement an interagency Information Sharing Agreement to exchange vital information about students of concern with law enforcement and other community agencies.*

## **Requirements of Senate Bill 338**

Section 4 of the bill requires the Director of the Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment to establish the Safe to Tell Program within the Office. The Safe to Tell Program must enable any person to anonymously report any dangerous, violent, or unlawful activity which is being conducted or threatened to be conducted on the property of a public school, at an activity sponsored by the

school, or on the school bus of a public school. In addition, Section 4 provides that any information received by the Program is confidential and further provides methods and procedures to ensure that anonymity. Sections 5 and 6 further set into statute the specifics of maintaining anonymous reporting.

Section 7.5 of the bill established the Safe to Tell Program Advisory Committee within the Office. The Committee is required to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature including information about the number of reports received by the Safe to Tell Program and any recommendations for the improvement of the Program not later than June 30, 2016.

As delineated in Senate Bill 338, the Safe to Tell Program Advisory Committee is composed of these individuals representing a range of constituencies involved in the lives of young people and their families.

- 1     **Dr. Eddie Ableser**                     Director, Safe and Respectful Learning  
  Environment Office  
  Nevada Department of Education
  
- 2     **Misty Vaughan Allen**                 Suicide Prevention Coordinator  
  Division of Public and Behavioral Health  
  Department of Health and Human Services  
  State of Nevada
  
- 3     **Patrick Baldwin**                     Director of Crime Analysis  
  Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department  
  Southern Nevada Counter-Terrorism Center
  
- 4     **Dr. Cathy Conger**                     Representative: Nevada Association of School  
  Administrators
  
- 5     **Bob Dorsey**                             Program Manager  
  Northern Nevada Regional Intelligence Center  
  Washoe County Sheriff's Office
  
- 6     **Senator Patricia Farley**               Nevada Senate
  
- 7     **Patrick Gavin**                         Executive Director  
  Nevada Charter School Authority
  
- 8     **Jason Lamberth**                     Parent Advocate
  
- 9     **Pete Mangum**                         School Trustee, White Pine County School  
  District  
  Representative: Nevada Association of School  
  Boards

10	<b>Bob Mars</b>	Representative: Nevada Association of School Administrators
11	<b>Dr. Dotty Merrill</b>	Executive Director Representative: Nevada Association of School Boards
12	<b>Ryan Miller</b>	Deputy Chief, Investigations Division Department of Public Safety State of Nevada
13	<b>Ruben Murillo</b>	President Nevada State Education Association
14	<b>Dr. Colleen Odom</b>	School Psychologist Washoe County School District
15	<b>Sheila Parise</b>	School Counselor
16	<b>Senator David Parks</b>	Nevada Senate
17	<b>Assemblyman Stephen Silberkraus</b>	Nevada Assembly
18	<b>Assemblywoman Ellen Spiegel</b>	Nevada Assembly
19	<b>Ben Trotter</b>	Sheriff, Churchill County
20	<b>Teresa White</b>	Superintendent Douglas County School District

### **Work of the Advisory Committee**

The Advisory Committee met on these dates using video conference facilities:

- November 23, 2015
- January 28, 2016
- March 10, 2016
- May 26, 2016
- June 9, 2016

At its first meeting, members of the Advisory Committee elected Dr. Dotty Merrill to serve as Chair.

In addition, the Advisory Committee held a face-to-face meeting in Carson City on April 14, 2016, for the purpose of receiving training from Susan Payne [Colorado Office of the Attorney General]. Thereafter, the Advisory Committee held a Go to Meeting teleconference with Ms. Payne to view the P3 software used by the Colorado Safe2Tell Initiative for reporting and accountability purposes.

In accordance with its statutory responsibilities, the Advisory Committee formed working groups to explore a number of areas related to development and implementation of the Safe to Tell Program. Those working groups included:

- Overview of Methodologies and Training in Other States;
- Articulation of Reporting;
- Social Media Platforms;
- Training and Multiple Dimensions Connected with Training;
- Direct Texting Line; and
- Anonymity.

Reports from these working groups were received periodically over the course of the Advisory Committee's meetings.

During the meeting on March 10, 2016, the Advisory Committee adopted these six pillars that had been adopted several years ago by the Colorado Safe2Tell Foundation:

- Prevention and early intervention;
- A 24/7 answering point;
- Anonymity;
- Training;
- Quality assurance; and
- Accountability.

The Advisory Committee strongly supports these pillars as the framework for Nevada's initiative.

## **DATA AND RELATED INFORMATION**

A comparative examination of the data from the Colorado Safe2Tell program relative to how the program may impact Nevada suggests that the initiative would create a critical safety net for Nevada students, their schools, their families, and their communities.

The Colorado population is approximately 5,356,000 vs. Nevada's population at 2,839,000—Nevada has roughly 50 percent of Colorado's population.

Total calls for service generated during the full ten years of the Colorado Safe2Tell program are calculated at 11,807 from 2004 to 2014. With about half of the Colorado population, it is estimated that the total number of Nevada calls over the next ten years would exceed, 5,900.

The current cost associated with the Colorado Safe2Tell program is estimated at \$350,000 each year. At the program "run rate" of \$350,000 per year, the average cost of managing a single call for service in the program would be about \$110.00 per call. This is a small price to pay, however, for preventing a tragic school violence incident or saving a student's life.

In examining data from across Nevada, the Advisory Committee has observed that statistics related to school and student safety are broad in scope and

disparate in nature. Organizations and entities engaging in early intervention and prevention track reports and responses in varying categories and in diverse ways. Rather than try to provide detailed data that often lack demonstrable comparability, the Advisory Committee has chosen to share high level information with components that are broad and yet definitely acknowledge issues directly connected with school safety, security, and personal health.

Disparate reporting emphasizes the need for the Safe to Tell initiative’s use of a software system that is content-protected to ensure anonymity while providing cumulative, consistent, and detailed reporting of actions and follow up taken by school staff or law enforcement. Further, the Advisory Committee acknowledges the need for a research component that will yield consistent and comparable statistical information.

One of the best indicators of the need for the Safe to Tell initiatives comes to policymakers from students themselves. Ongoing monitoring of youth risk behaviors is important for the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs designed as interventions to improve adolescent health and increase safety at school and in the community. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a national monitoring survey established in 1991 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor the prevalence of risk behaviors among youth. The Nevada High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a biennial, anonymous, and voluntary survey of students in ninth through twelfth grades in regular public, charter, and alternative schools.

Although not all high school students participate in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, it is still important because the results and weighting process ensure that the estimates accurately represent the entire student population in each region and the State as a whole.

Important for purposes of the Advisory Committee report in demonstrating the need for Safe to Tell in Nevada are these results in two crucial categories from the 2015 Nevada High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey. It should be remembered that these are incidents reported by students themselves anonymously, much as students would report tips anonymously to the Safe to Tell call center. Results from 2013 and 2015 are shown for comparative purposes along with a comment about the difference from one year to the next. Even when a decrease is shown from 2013 to 2015, the percentages indicate that a high percentage of Nevada students could benefit from the early intervention and prevention of the Safe to Tell initiative.

<b>EMOTIONAL HEALTH</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Percentage of students who felt sad or hopeless (almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities during the 12 months before the survey)	31.7	34.5	No Change

Percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide (during the 12 months before the survey)	19.3	17.7	No Change
Percentage of students who made a plan about how they would attempt suicide (during the 12 months before the survey)	16.5	15.8	No Change
<b>VIOLENCE-RELATED BEHAVIORS</b>			
Percentage of students who carried a weapon (such as a gun, knife, or club) on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	15.8	16.9	No Change
Percentage of students who carried a gun (on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	5.4	4.8	No Change
Percentage of students who carried a weapon on school property (such as a gun, knife, or club) on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	4.1	3.7	No Change
Percentage of students who did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	11.1	7.6	Significant Decrease
Percentage of students who were in a physical fight (one or more times during the 12 months before the survey)	23.5	19.3	Significant Decrease
Percentage of students who were in a physical fight on school property (one or more times during the 12 months before the survey)	7.0	5.3	Significant Decrease
Percentage of students who were ever physically forced to have sexual intercourse (when they did not want to)	11.4	9.0	Significant Decrease
Percentage of students who experienced physical dating violence (one or more times during the 12 months before the survey, including being hit, slammed into something, or injured with an object or weapon on purpose by someone they were dating or going out with among students who dated or went out with someone during the 12 months before the survey)	10.4	9.9	No Change

Based on the results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, many of the 461,000 K-12 students across all of the seventeen counties need the kind of help that the Safe to Tell initiative can provide to intervene early to remove or alter threatening circumstances that endanger the safety and well-being of Nevada students. From the research regarding what bystanders know in advance about behavior that threatens the safety of students, we have learned that in more than 81% of situations others are aware of threatening behavior before it happens and typically in more than 59% of situations more than one person shares this awareness. From the same research, we also know that of those individuals who had prior knowledge, 93% were peers of the perpetrators—friends, schoolmates, or siblings.

Safe to Tell is grounded on the premise that prevention and early intervention based upon anonymous reporting are the keys to preventing violence and saving lives. Safe to Tell is also based on the principles of educating young

people and school staff on critical issues, encouraging them to be part of the solution of prevention, equipping them with a tangible and direct way to report anonymously and empowering them to make a difference. We can see from the above statistics based on anonymous responses from Nevada young people that the State clearly needs the full implementation of the Safe to Tell initiative. This is tied to the Advisory Committee's recommendation in support of developing a Safe to Tell awareness plan targeting educational, community, parental, and business groups.

Even with limited marketing and no coordinated education campaign, the Safe to Tell call number shown on the Nevada Department of Education website has received sixteen calls since October 2015. In the first year of the Colorado Safe2Tell initiative, about 100 calls were received with marketing and a restricted education campaign. Given the population differences described above, the number of calls in Nevada will likely reach a comparable level with Colorado by the end of September 2016. Developing and implementing appropriate training for educators, students, families, and others regarding Safe to Tell reporting will empower students to make a difference in their own lives and those of their fellow students.

Other indicators also support the need and urgency for full implementation of Safe to Tell in Nevada. For example, from the Southern Nevada Counter-Terrorism Center data for the 2015-2016 school year we know that the Center distributed 170 school advisories. These advisories typically involve students making threats about school violence and frequently involve photos posted in social media sites. The advisories were sent to appropriate law enforcement and school authorities to be investigated. All advisories require some kind of disposition reporting back to the Center.

From the Crisis Call Center statistics for the 2015 fiscal year, we know that 46% of text reports received focused on physical and mental health concerns, 11% concentrated on suicide threats, and 12% mentioned threats involving violence, abuse, and crimes.

We also know that in 2014, Nevada ranked 14<sup>th</sup> for drug poisoning deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Moreover, the CDC reported that the drug poisoning death rate reached 18.4 per 100,000 population—higher than the national rate of 14.7. This represents another group of young people who could benefit from the safety net of early intervention and prevention that would be provided by full implementation of Safe to Tell in Nevada.

Comparing reports from the Colorado Safe2Tell program with information from Washoe County Children's Services suggests that many of their current reports would likely be made, instead, to Nevada's Safe to Tell initiative for purposes of safety and security. For example, among the total 22,162 reports received, 20% were from parents, neighbors or friends, other relatives, and/or others in unknown categories. These reports are aligned with the findings of the Bystander study and other research that stress the importance of using reports/tips

provided from young people who know what's going on and who are willing to share that information with adults who will do something about it.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **Safe to Tell General Recommendations**

- Require that each school identify a team of at least three members whose names will be provided to the Safe to Tell call center as those who will receive notification from the call center in the event of a tip/report about a student enrolled in their school and who will ensure immediate action and investigation in response to all reports
- Implement a recognition program in the Nevada Department of Education to publicly applaud schools that develop school-wide initiatives that effectively reduce bullying, cyberbullying, etc., or that promote the Safe to Tell Initiative in creative ways that can be replicated at other schools
- Place the Safe to Tell call number and brief information on the back of each student's ID card
- Continue the Advisory Committee in the Office of a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment with the additional inclusion of a student representative and a representative from private schools as well as appropriate staff and resources to coordinate and support the initiative with funding for the Committee members to travel to a meeting once per year
- Develop a Nevada-specific name and logo for the Safe to Tell Initiative, perhaps through sponsorship of a statewide contest for middle and high school students
- Pursue funding that will enable the Safe to Tell Program to be fully implemented in Nevada

### **Safe to Tell Legal Recommendation**

- Ensure that it is lawful in Nevada for anonymous reports to Safe to Tell to be shared among law enforcement agencies, school staff, and appropriate state agencies

### **Safe to Tell Call Center Recommendations**

- Develop a reporting center for tips/reports that accommodates telephone, web, mobile app, and other future technologies

- Establish a centralized data collection point with resources for 24/7 responses to telephone call, email message, or mobile phone reports
- Ensure that 24/7 call center personnel are appropriately cross trained to gather detail appropriate for following up on the tip/report
- Develop a process for handling reports when the call center does not know the jurisdiction of the school or individual about whom the report is made
- Develop a clear reporting process to accommodate calls made after school hours on all days of the week and when school is not in session

### **Safe to Tell Technology Recommendations**

- Utilize a software system that is content-protected to ensure anonymity while providing a cumulative and detailed report of actions and follow up taken by school staff or law enforcement personnel
- Develop report templates to ensure tracking of tips and their outcomes
- Develop reports for accountability purposes
- Develop a research component that will yield statistical information about the most frequent days of the week that reports are made, the most frequent times that reports are made, categories of reporting and their frequency, and disposition of reported tips

### **Safe to Tell Marketing and Educational Recommendations**

- Appropriately train members of the school team involved with receiving Safe to Tell tips/reports
- Develop a Safe to Tell awareness plan targeting education, community, parental and business groups
- Develop and implement appropriate training for educators, students, families, and others regarding Safe to Tell reporting and the importance of partnership and collaboration to ensure the safety of all students

## **CONCLUSION**

Members of the Advisory Committee have been privileged to work on the Safe to Tell initiative because of the significant potential impact such a safety net can have for all Nevada students, yet we know that this work is not finished.

As with any far-reaching program, there are many pieces that must be put into place for Safe to Tell to achieve the goals of engaging, educating, equipping, and empowering students as part of the solution to prevent violence and ensure health and safety in our schools and in our communities.

It will take hard work and additional resources to change attitudes and break the code of silence that often surrounds the most serious problems that our students face each day.

Safe2Tell has been effective in Colorado in creating safer schools and safer communities. We know that this can happen in Nevada, too, and look ahead to a system that facilitates intervention at the earliest possible point in the lives of young people who are struggling and helps them when they need it before the situation turns into a tragedy.

We look forward to future guidance and assistance from the Legislature and Governor to collaboratively bring Safe to Tell to full implementation in Nevada.