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VEA Applauds AG's Decision Saying Lee County Gun Proposal Unlawful

The Virginia Education Association applauded Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring's opinion that Lee County lacks the authority to arm teachers and other school personnel.

"The Attorney General's opinion means Virginia school divisions need to look for more comprehensive solutions to ensure school safety and prevent outbreaks of gun violence," said VEA President Jim Livingston, a middle school math teacher in the Prince William County public schools.

"Our schools need more books, more computers, and more counselors," he said. "They do not need more guns. When the safety of our children is involved, comprehensive threats deserve comprehensive solutions."

Livingston said schools in Lee County and many other jurisdictions are underfunded, adding the state must do more to ensure all school divisions have the resources to make school campuses safe.

This month the Commonwealth Institute issued a report calling for increasing the numbers of counselors and other support positions in schools, because these positions play a vital role in ensuring school safety and preventing violence. The Institute said that Virginia public schools added 57,000 students since 2007-08 but that more than 2,300 school support positions, which includes school nurses, psychologists, social workers, and other support staff, had been cut.

"We need to address school counselor caseloads," Livingston said. "We need to expand programs that identify and help students experiencing a mental health crisis. We need to attack the problem of bullying in school and make sure each student sees the school as a safe place to learn and grow. What we don't need is to add more guns on our school campuses."

VEA created a Task Force on Student and Staff Safety in March that will make recommendations before the General Assembly convenes in January 2019.

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Link to Herring media advisory: <https://www.oag.state.va.us/media-center/news-releases/1259-august-28-2018-herring-issues-opinion-explaining-why-lee-county-s-decision-to-arm-teachers-is-unlawfu>

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