



Should private schools hire SROs?

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The Covenant School shooting has many reflecting on security measures needed in schools, and the role of school resource officers.

A bill currently on Governor Bill Lee's desk would allow private schools to partner with local law enforcement to hire school resource officers. Up to this point, private schools in Tennessee could hire off duty police officers and private security organizations for school resources.

Metro police said the private Presbyterian school had undergone active shooter training in 2022, which officers believe helped save lives. However, the institution did not have a school resource officer. News 2 asked the National Association of School Resource Officers how common it is for private schools to hire school resource officers, to which Director of Operations Mac Hardy replied "not many."

"Nashville response was phenomenal; I thought that getting the call and being on site then moving directly to the threat was picture perfect," the former teacher and retired police sergeant said about bodycam footage. "It isn't a headmistress' responsibility to run towards that shooting; it's an armed, trained police officer to run towards that shooting."

Hardy said having an individual devoted to security on school grounds can help cut down on response time and may be able stop a threat sooner.

Research from the CATO Institute found that private schools see fewer shootings than public schools. However, Hardy noted school shootings are on the rise across the board.

"Too many times we hear that, 'We thought it could never happen to us,' and that is said at every school shooting. This can happen anywhere, in any community, at any time.

Unlike public schools, private schools typically don't have an assigned SRO from their local police department or sheriff's office. Nonpublic schools are also left to foot the bill for private security.

Although hiring officers for a school may be costly, Hardy encouraged all institutions to have a conversation considering it. Although many private schools haven't had trained, on-site security in the past, Hardy said more are adding them amid mounting school shooting incidents.

"They need to have the conversation. What do they feel like they need to do to keep that environment safe? Do they need to hire an off-duty officer, a recently retired officer?"