

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 838
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Education
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Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Why is this bill called Alyssa's Law?

Alyssa Alhadeff was a 14-year-old student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High school in Parkland Florida. She was a victim on February 14, 2018, when a former student killed 17 people in a mass school shooting. Alyssa's mother, Lori Alhadeff founded a nonprofit organization, Make Our Schools Safe, which is aimed at providing safety features tailored to the specific needs of schools.

Emergency Funding Already Exists

On June 28, 2022, Governor Greg Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, Speaker Dade Phelan, Senate Finance Committee Chair Joan Huffman, and House Appropriations Chair Dr. Greg Bonnen announced the transfer of \$105.5 million to support additional school safety and mental health initiatives through August 31, 2023. \$100.5 million will be transferred to state agencies and programs to enhance school safety and mental health services in Uvalde and throughout Texas. The funding will provide...

- \$17.1 million for school districts to purchase silent panic alert technology; school safety supplemental funding.

Summary

- For school district and public charters, panic buttons for each classroom
- Access to telephone does not meet this bill's requirements
- School districts may use school safety allotment, other funds, procurement process to comply with this act.
- Vendor neutral language

Why Panic Buttons?

Panic alert systems are a cost effective and highly effective way to provide interoperability with first responders in an emergency. The technology notifies law enforcement immediately while also sending necessary details to best respond to a threat. Location details are immediately provided to ensure that triage and treatment of those needing medical attention can be done urgently.

If Funding is Already Available, Why Pass This Bill?

After the Santa Fe High School shooting, the legislature placed \$100 million into "School Safety and Security Grants." Upon review, following the Uvalde tragedy, it became clear that there was an excess balance remaining in the School Safety and Security Grant fund, even though these funds had been available for two years. School districts have a lot to prioritize, and proactively prioritizing grants can be a struggle. A statutory mandate will ensure adoption of panic buttons.

Committee Substitute

- Clarify the definition of "9-1-1" call to "9-1-1 notification" to include alerts other than 9-1-1 that still notify law enforcement in an efficient, effective manner.
- "Silent panic alert technology" replaces "panic alert device" throughout the bill.

S.B. 838 amends current law relating to school districts and open-enrollment charter schools providing silent panic alert technology in classrooms.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Authorizes this Act to be cited as Alyssa's Law.

SECTION 2. Amends Subchapter D, Chapter 37, Education Code, by adding Section 37.117, as follows:

Sec. 37.117. SILENT PANIC ALERT TECHNOLOGY. (a) Requires each school district and open-enrollment charter school to provide each classroom in the district or school with silent panic alert technology that allows for immediate contact with district or school emergency services and emergency services agencies, law enforcement agencies, health departments, and fire departments.

(b) Provides that silent panic alert technology provided by a school district or open-enrollment charter school under this section does not satisfy the requirement under Section 37.108(a)(2) (relating to requiring that the multihazard emergency operations plan provide for measures to ensure certain employees have access to an electronic communication device allowing for immediate contact with certain services and agencies) for the district or school to ensure employees have classroom access to a telephone or another electronic communication device.

(c) Authorizes a school district or open-enrollment charter school, to comply with this section, to:

(1) use funds provided to the district or school through the school safety allotment under Section 48.115 (School Safety Allotment) or other available funds; and

(2) use the district's or school's customary procurement process.

SECTION 3. Provides that this Act applies beginning with the 2025–2026 school year.

SECTION 4. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2023.