

Mr. Rasmus called the Millville Area School District Safety Committee Meeting to order at 5:32 pm.

Those present in the High School Library were Joseph Rasmus, Superintendent; Whitney Holloway, Business Manager; Alex Cavallini, community member; Katie Downs, community member; Michael VanDine, Chief of Police; Leon Bogdan, Press Enterprise; Heather Mausteller, Committee member; Susan Myers, Board President; Greg Hemsarh, Committee member; David Sterngold, school solicitor of McNerney, Page, Vanderlin, and Hall; and Chelsea Rosenberger, Board Recording Secretary.

David Sterngold, Esq.: McNerney, Page, Vanderlin & Hall - District Solicitor

- ❖ Mr. Rasmus began the meeting with a brief review of the historical information regarding the district's engagement with Hemlock Township for School Resource Officer services. He explained that our district solicitors provided the Request for Proposals in November so that the district could solidify a new contract for SRO services once the contract expired in December. However, there were further variables to consider, and so the district engaged with Hemlock Township for a contract extension through the end of June 2025. Mr. Rasmus commented that the district is open to other models moving forward, but the process needed to be solidified soon.
- ❖ Mr. Sterngold then gave a presentation to the Committee and those present regarding the models open to school districts to fulfill the requirements for safety personnel. He explained that there are three models that schools can utilize.
 - The first model he shared is the Partnership Model. Under the partnership model, the school district partners with a local police department who provides an officer, and typically, the district pays a portion of the officer's salary. Mr. Sterngold explained that some benefits to this model include current and direct connection with the police department, it provides the most readily available safety and security, the officer has full arrest powers, the officer is fully trained by the employing police department, and the vicarious liability of the officer goes back to the police department where they are employed, rather than the school district. On the other hand, Mr. Sterngold explained that the largest negative aspect to this model would be the financial burden typically associated for the school district.
 - Next, Mr. Sterngold discussed the School Police Officer (SPO) model whereby instead of employing a police department, the police officer would be employed by the school district. He shared that the benefits to this model are that these individuals are typically former police officers and have strong relationships with their former police department and that the cost burden is typically lower. However, Mr. Sterngold communicated that some negative aspects of this model are that the vicarious liability would go back to the school district, so the district would be liable for the actions of that employee just like all other employees. Additionally, he explained that the district would have to petition the court to approve and deputize these officers as school police officers. Mr. Sterngold shared that this process can be cumbersome to the district because the full time officer and all other substitute part time officers would also have to be similarly deputized. Some additional costs of this model for the school district would be cost for compliance with the courts, training, and certifications for each officer as well as additional lawyer costs due to many scenarios necessitating communication with the school solicitor.
 - Finally, Mr. Sterngold explained that the final model was a Private Security Firm model whereby the district would hire a private security firm to fulfill the safety and security

requirements. He explained that most districts use this model for supplementary security and not as their primary security option, adding that this is often the cheapest option for districts. However, Mr. Sterngold reiterated that in terms of safety, this was not the best option because they do not have arresting power and typically do not have strong relationships with local law enforcement. As far as liability, all liability and concerns would be negotiated and written within the terms of the contract, as well as for insurance.

- Mr. Sterngold then shared some of his experience with other school districts that his firm supports. He explained that Williamsport School District formerly had a similar model to Millville using a partnership whereby they paid about fifty percent of the officers' salaries. Now, he shared, they utilize a blended model in that the district still has a relationship with local law enforcement, but they also employ their own officers. Mr. Sterngold then explained that South Williamsport School District formerly employed their own officers but now utilize the partnership model with the South Williamsport police department.
- In closing, Mr. Sterngold posed to the Committee some broad concerns to consider: financial burden for the district, liability concerns with the different models, the administrative burden to coordinate and manage these models, and the overall safety of students.
- Mr. Rasmus commented that at his previous district, the school had a private security firm and asked Mr. Sterngold if those officers could detain someone and what the other limitations were.
 - Mr. Sterngold answered that private security officers are limited in their detention abilities with many more gray areas in terms of powers when the district is asking the officer to make a legal decision, when they may not have the power to do so. Additionally, he explained that these officers do not have full arrest abilities like an SRO and that police officers have appropriate training in that regard whereas, the district may not know what training level is given to the private security officers.
 - Mr. Rasmus then asked for clarification because currently, the district does not have to maintain the training for the SRO from Hemlock Township and if the district went with an SPO model, would we need to manage the officer's training and compliance.
 - Mr. Sterngold answered that yes, the district would have to maintain the training and compliance for each officer.
- ❖ Chief VanDine added that if the district decides to go with the SPO model, they have to be an Act 120 officer, and if they are retired officers, they have to be affiliated with a police department within three years of their appointment and recertified as a school police officer. Additionally, the district would need to ensure all training including, but not limited to annual training, CPR training, AED training, firearm testing and safety, and certifications. Additionally, the district would need to provide a vehicle, uniforms, salary, and potentially, benefits.
 - Mr. Hemsarh asked why the district would need to provide a vehicle.

- Mr. VanDine answered that it is needed for emergencies as well as, at times, the transportation of students, and to hold all of the equipment. Additionally, the officer needs to be visible for security purposes regularly.
- Mr. Rasmus asked if there are instances where a student would need to be transported by an officer to a detention center or home.
- Mr. VanDine answered that this was rare, but it would be needed in case of an emergency between the buildings.
- ❖ Mrs. Mausteller then commented that with Hemlock Township, the district does not have to worry about any of those concerns. She communicated that if the district were to go with a private security company, we would have to assume that the company contracted would be managing all of that compliance, asking if the district would need to check on that.
 - Mr. Hemsarh commented that those details would all be spelled out in the contract, including training and liability.
 - Mrs. Mausteller reiterated her concern that the district may not know this for sure.
 - Mr. Rasmus answered that the district is currently responsible and ultimately liable for all employees and vendors as far as compliance and maintaining that compliance. He explained that he had worked at another district where that compliance paperwork was not maintained for a contracted company and the state made the school close for three days until it was rectified.
 - Mr. Sterngold commented that it would fundamentally be a contract issue and that there would have to be indemnification built into the contract to address that concern. Additionally, he said it would be beneficial to look at some other contracts at similar districts.
 - Mr. Rasmus added that the Request for Proposals (RFP) may be the place to write some of those specifications that the district is looking to achieve.
- ❖ Mrs. Myers then asked if the individual overseeing the SPO has to be trained specifically for that role.
 - Mr. Rasmus answered that it has been a few years since he has served that way but that there was currently training needed to serve as the Safety and Security Officer for the district.
- ❖ Mr. Mills then asked if these models match Act 67 and the requirements in the law.
 - Mr. Sterngold answered that yes, they were the same models.
- ❖ Mr. Hemsarh then asked for clarification if a school police officer would have all the same training as a school resource officer already does.
 - Mr. VanDine answered that they do not have the arrest powers.
- ❖ Mrs. Myers then asked if the district would need to separately deputize each SPO, including the substitute officers.
 - Mr. VanDine answered that yes, each SPO would need to be deputized, adding that essentially, the district is creating its own police department. He commented that Millville is one of the only local schools who have an SRO model still in place.
 - Mr. Rasmus added that when our current SRO is absent, Hemlock Township covers the absence with other officers. Whereas, previously, Mr. Rasmus worked in another school with a private security firm, and they were not able to do very much and did not have substitute coverage. Additionally, he shared that the district is required to

hold all hazard drills, and through this partnership, the district has held robust drills utilizing real life scenarios.

- ❖ Mr. Hemsarth commented that our current model is the “Cadillac” model, and unfortunately, we cannot sustain the financial burden of that model. He asked the administration present what an officer without arresting powers would look like on a daily basis for discipline.
 - Mr. Mills answered that if there was a citation or something bigger, that comes from the principal’s office and ends with a call to the state police previously. So, that would not be a big daily change in practice.
 - Mr. Hemsarth then clarified if something must be reported, that would still have to follow our policy and go to the appropriate local law enforcement with jurisdiction.
- ❖ Mr. Mills then asked what the typical response time would be for the state police if called.
 - Mrs. Myers answered that it varies based on the current situations at that moment, adding that often, it can be over an hour.
 - Mr. Rasmus added that at a previous district, the response time was quite long for many situations.
- ❖ Mr. Cavallini then asked if we knew the numbers for how often we currently have to call the police.
 - Chief Vandine shared the statistics for the year thus far, which was quite high for a variety of reasons or concerns.
- ❖ Mrs. Mausteller commented that using the SPO model would mean that the district would have to have more than one employee which has historically been an issue.
 - Mr. Rasmus added that with retired police officers, a benefit is the lower cost burden and that most of the cost with Hemlock Township is based on insurance/benefits for the officers. The retired police officers may not need insurance, which would be a cost savings to the district.
- ❖ Mr. Rasmus then asked Mrs. Holloway to calculate the salary for an SPO based on the current hourly rate of our SRO.
 - Mrs. Myers commented that the district needs to include in the RFP the staffing needs to ensure that any private security companies would be able to cover those needs as articulated.
 - Mrs. Holloway shared that the salary cost would be just below a step one teacher, in terms of salary only.
 - Mr. Rasmus explained that this figure was based on the hourly rate of our current SRO multiplied by the number of days employed.
- ❖ Mrs. Mausteller explained that when the district first entered into this contract with Hemlock Township, the biggest concern was full time coverage by an officer.
- ❖ Mr. Rasmus then asked the solicitor if it was reasonable to add the language about staffing needs of the district into the request for proposals documentation.
 - Mr. Hemsarth also asked if the Board could reach out to a private security firm to get information or a presentation.
 - Mr. Rasmus was unsure if the district could reach out like that outside of the RFP process.
 - Mr. Sterngold answered that his recommendation would be for the district to identify another local school district who employs a private security company to garner some

information. He added that it may be helpful for the solicitor or the Business Manager to reach out for this information, adding that this would be the route to take over reaching out directly to companies.

- Mr. Mills explained that he reached out to the Business Manager at Northwest School District because they have a retired school police officer with a per diem rate as well as an agency that supplies a security guard for the Elementary Schools at the rate of \$27 per hour. He shared that the main duties for these guards are patrolling, greeting students, and being a presence in the school.
- Mr. Hemsarh asked if the private security guard could break up a fight.
- Mr. Mills answered that they do not really get involved with discipline, but rather do routine walkthroughs. He shared that the total cost for the three guards is approximately \$108,000. However, he explained, there is not a substitute officer at the high school and that the individual there is an independent contractor with his own 1099 form so there is no additional cost to that district.
- ❖ Mrs. Holloway then shared that she had gathered poll results from other Business Managers at our local school districts within our intermediate unit and that the results were predominantly under the SPO model.
 - Mrs. Mausteller asked that Mrs. Holloway share this information with the Board.
 - Mrs. Holloway answered that she would and that the schools indicated simply a pay rate range and that no private security companies are employed.
- ❖ Ms. Rosenberger then asked if the private security officers have to be deputized like the SPO model.
 - Chief VanDine answered that no, they are not deputized because they do not have any arresting powers and that they are very limited in what they can do.
 - Mr. Mills commented that they do need to have a NASRO certification.
 - Mrs. Mausteller asked if that had a cost to obtain.
 - Mr. Rasmus answered that yes, there was a cost to that certification.
- ❖ Mr. Rasmus then asked what the priorities would be for the Committee at the next meeting.
 - Mr. Hemsarh answered that he would like to have information or have someone from a school district that employs a private security company come to share with the Committee.
 - Mr. Rasmus answered that they would make this a priority.
 - Mrs. Mausteller asked that information would be provided about training and resources needed for the next meeting as well.
- ❖ The Committee discussed a date and determined it would be Thursday, February 20, 2025 at 5:30 in the high school library.

ADJOURNMENT

The Committee adjourned the meeting at 6:51 pm.



Chelsea Rosenberger
Board Recording Secretary