***2019 VA General Assembly passes School Safety Legislation***

A Select Committee on School Safety was formed by Speaker Cox after the tragic shooting in Parkland Florida. The Select Committee is the first of its kind in over 150 years in Virginia. The committee was designed to be a “do something” committee that put politics aside to protect our students and teachers. The committee presented a comprehensive final report with 24 priority recommendations to make our students and schools safer through threat prevention, counseling realignment and increased mental health services, and increased training for school personnel and school security. Here are the results:

HB1729 requires each public school counselor to spend at least 80 percent of their staff time during normal school hours in the direct counseling of individual students or groups of students. Currently, school counselors are overburdened with administrative tasks that limit the amount of time they can spend providing direct student services. HB1729 will help to ensure that students receive the counseling services they need. **Del. Fowler co-patron.**   
  
 School Resource Officers are our first line of defense. With that in mind, HB1733 requires the school board in each school division in which the local law-enforcement agency employs school resource officers to enter into a memorandum of understanding with such local law-enforcement agency that sets forth the powers and duties of the school resource officers. School Resource Officers are responsible for upholding the law, not school board policy; therefore, it is imperative localities clearly articulate the role and responsibilities of School Resource Officers. **Del. Fowler co-patron.**  
  
 Since school security should start with the design of a school building, HB1738 requires a licensed architect who is trained and experienced in crime prevention through environmental design to approve plans and specifications for new or remodeled public school building construction. These architects look at corridors, open spaces, and floor plans through the lense of school safety to ensure learning environments are as safe as possible. **Del. Fowler co-patron.**  
  
 School design, upgrades and construction is very expensive. For this reason, these must be ensure our dollars are spent effectively. HB1725 requires each school board, in consultation with the local building official and local fire marshal, to develop a procurement plan to ensure that all security enhancements to public school buildings are in compliance with the Uniform Statewide Building Code and Statewide Fire Prevention Code. **Del. Fowler co-patron.**  
  
 Emergency preparedness requires practice. To help ensure our school administrators, teachers and students are prepared to meet any emergency situation HB1732 will require each public elementary and secondary school to conduct at least one general safety/emergency training or drill for students per year. **Del. Fowler co-patron.**  
  
 Finally, school safety was a major funding priority for the 2019 General Assembly and our budget reflects that, **expanding from $6 million to $12 million in funding for school resource officers, infrastructure, and other initiatives designed to keep our students safe in school.** The budget also increases the school division grant award cap amount for School Security Equipment grants from $100,000 to $250,000 each year. The budget also adds an additional $12 million for elementary, middle and high school counselors in 2020.