



KYM L. WORTHY
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

DONN FRESARD
CHIEF ASSISTANT

DARYL CARSON
CHIEF OF STAFF

COUNTY OF WAYNE
**OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTING
ATTORNEY**
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

1200 FRANK MURPHY HALL OF JUSTICE
1441 ST. ANTOINE STREET
DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226-2302

TEL: (313) 224-5777
FAX: (313) 224-0974

September 12, 2019

Dear Parent/Guardian:

With a new school year beginning, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office is encouraging all parents/guardians to have a conversation with your school-age children regarding an issue that has become all too prevalent, namely threats to commit school violence.

As periodic school shootings have become an unfortunate reality across the country, these incidents are naturally publicized in the news and social media. Experience has taught us that the publicity of these school shooting events often prompts a small subset of students to make similar type threats against their schools, teachers, and/or fellow classmates. In many of these cases, the student who made the threat tells investigators that they were "just joking" and seem genuinely shocked by how serious the consequences are for making the threat. Often they make the threat thinking that it is not a big deal as long as they did not plan to actually carry it out. Michigan law, however, makes it a crime to make a threat, even if the person making the threat did not have the intent or the capability of actually carrying it out.

When a threat is made we cannot immediately know whether the threat is a serious threat, or whether the threat is meant to be a so-called prank. Therefore, we in the law enforcement community must take seriously every threat, because to not do so would be to put your child at risk and the community at risk, and we simply cannot take that chance. My office takes these cases extremely seriously, not only because of the need to keep your child and the community safe, but also because of the disruption of the school environment and the significant expenditure of resources by the school and by law enforcement that even a "prank" threat causes.

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Please talk with your children. Help them understand that their words can have lifelong consequences. Students can be charged with crimes such as False Threat of Terrorism or Threat of Terrorism. A new law enacted last year also makes it a crime to Threaten to Commit Violence Against Students or Employees on School Property. These crimes can result in sentences up to 10 or 20 years in prison for an adult. It is worth noting that many seniors in high school are already 17 or older, which legally makes them an adult in the state of Michigan. In addition to the potential legal consequences, such charges may: affect a student's ability to get federal financial aid for college; cause them to lose college scholarships; cause them to be denied college admission; and result in them having to disclose pending cases or criminal convictions on job applications.

We know that in past school shootings, the individuals involved usually shared their plans with one or more of their peers, before they acted on those plans. Therefore, it is critical that you also encourage your children to report any threats that they hear about (including threats posted via social media, texts, emails, etc.) so that these tragic situations can be prevented before they have a chance to start. Stress to your children that reporting could be life-saving and that it is "always better to be safe than sorry."

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for working with my office to keep your children and our community safe.

Sincerely,

Kym L. Worthy
Wayne County Prosecutor