Preventing school violence

New program will train police officers to help assess threats, academic buildings

Ohio school shootings

Gun violence at Ohio’s K-12 schools through the years has included suicides, students or teachers targeted after arguments, and one incident of an indiscriminate mass shooting (Chardon in 2012). The number of school shootings by year*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Number of Shootings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'70-'79</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'80-'89</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>'90-'99</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>'00-'09</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'10-'18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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Notes: Shootings that took place on school grounds, such as in a parking lot after hours, but had no connections to students or staff members were not counted. It’s possible that an incident occurred that did not get counted, especially if it wasn’t reported by media.

* Years not listed had no recorded incidents.

Source: Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security database; Ohio Attorney General’s Office staff research

One of the questions that inevitably arises after a school shooting is: *When the shooter clearly showed signs of trouble, why wasn’t the attack prevented?*

“Prevention is the missing piece after every attack,” Attorney General Dave Yost said. “And the safety of children across our state depends on us plugging that gap.”

To that end, Yost and his team of school-safety experts have devised an initiative centered on the prevention of targeted violence. It will send funding to both law enforcement officers and schools.

“Since a teen gunman killed three students at Chardon High School in 2012, Ohio has started a tip line and worked with schools to create emergency plans,” the attorney general said. “Those are like bookends on a shelf, and what we still need are the books, which give meaning to the space in between.

“That’s why we’re asking law enforcement officers and school officials to team up to help prevent violence.”

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I wish Julia Roberts and Richard Gere had never made “Pretty Woman.”

That movie, a Cinderella story about a prostitute who finds love and a good man in the course of her working life, begs a question: Why should society tell two adults that one cannot pay the other for sex? Why should the government be able to set rules about what happens in private in a bedroom, or a hotel room?

The answer lies in the shadows of American society, among the unnoticed lives of the slaves.

Yes, slaves. Women — sometimes men, sometimes boys, but mostly women — are “groomed” by older men who wish to sell them as sex slaves. These slave masters look for vulnerable girls they can exploit, usually in their early to mid-teens, who are often already marginalised or traumatized by their own childhood experiences.

Enticing them at first — with attention, kindness, money, food, clothing — modern slave masters eventually introduce the girls to addictive drugs, and use their dependency or an outright threat of violence to coerce them into selling themselves for sex.

The slave master gets the money, of course — they call the women “ATMs.” The women get to keep the few dollars they manage to earn.

Not all prostitution is human trafficking, of course. What turns the selling of sex into human trafficking in persons is whether the money stays away the exception, not the rule.

“Grooming” the girls begins by getting them used to sex. They might be a free spirit, making a deliberate, calculated decision to get money.

The seller of the sex act might be a free spirit, making a deliberate, calculated decision to get money.

Yes, it’s “yes” because the slave master is waiting in his car outside in the parking lot, with a dose of heroin, a bar of heroin, a bat or a knife. You will never know.

A key idea in our system of criminal justice is that you must be able to know that you’re committing the prohibited act. But there’s no way to know if the thing you’re doing is a minor crime — prostitution — or the major crime of human trafficking.

When we’re talking about slavery, “I didn’t know” isn’t even an excuse. It’s an admission — an admission you took the risk that you were having sex without consent, the risk that your money was helping to keep another human being in slavery, no better than property. That’s why prostitution should not only remain illegal; it’s why we should up the ante on the buying of sex.

Currently, the buying and selling of sex is the same crime — a low-level misdemeanor — in spite of the fact that many women who are convicted of selling sex are doing so because they are forced into it, and are victims themselves.

The buyers of sex are never forced into it, and are never victims. They are eating their own appetites at the expense of another human being, predators who take what they want without regard to the costs of their freedom. Without their money, there is no market for sex; without a market, there is no human trafficking.

This fall, I will ask the General Assembly to split the buying and selling of sex into separate offenses, with buying being the more serious crime.

Slavery is a deep evil that we thought we had swept under the rug, but we haven’t. We have divided it up. The law says we can’t buy it, but we can sell it.

As a district attorney, I can’t get the help they need.

My hope is we can make a better safety net for victims so they can exit dangerous situations. That’s what we do to protect children — and we should be — but there are more victims.

I’ve been handling human trafficking cases on the ground for seven years.

What do you hope to accomplish with the AG’s human trafficking initiative?

What does your job entail?

The attorney general has set four priorities to fight human trafficking, and it’s my job to help him accomplish them. They are:

• Focusing on prevention and education to stop some of the inflow of victims.
• Creating legislative policy to make sure Ohio is doing what it can to fight trafficking.
• Assisting and training task forces and prosecutors to build human trafficking cases and developing more tools.

What do you hope to accomplish with the AG’s human trafficking initiative?

My hope is we can make a better safety net for victims so they can exit dangerous situations. That’s a huge part of it — getting victims to a place where they have access to help and they’re willing to take the help. That’s the specialty of my new colleague Jomel Aird.

I love training and teaching, and so I’m excited to share the things I’ve learned while trying, and indicating trafficking cases. Just as much, I want to learn from other people who handle these cases throughout the state. We all want to get a better court response.

And then I want to help task forces build the strongest cases possible. It’s hard to convince victims to cooperate if they’re worried about not being successful and their trafficker getting right back out of jail.

What legislative plans do you have?

The attorney general is pushing to separate the sale of sexual services from the use of the money, which would be a great start to decrease demand. I’d also like to push to get a felony strangulation statute in Ohio. Forty-eight other states have one.

The law would make strangling someone a felony of a third degree — traffickers have a lot of control through physical violence — and it would give prosecutors one more felony to charge in these cases. So many times we’ve focused on the human trafficking charge — and we should be — but there are more charges we can pursue to ensure victims get justice for everything that happened to them.

What first got you interested in a career in criminal justice?

I always wanted to be a lawyer, but in college I volunteered with the Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio as a hotline advocate and a hospital advocate. Once I discovered there was a specialized unit at the Franklin County Prosecutor’s Office that would allow me to pursue passions, I knew that’s where I was meant to be. I loved my time there, but am excited to join the AG team.
These teams, consisting of five to eight members, are guided by where the threat falls on this scale:

- **Very serious substantive threat**
- **Serious substantive threat**
- **Transient threat that does not involve a real intent to harm anyone**
- **Not a threat, but an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger or frustration**
- **Transient report, seeking to ward off problems**

The initiative aims to ensure that all 5,200 of the state’s school buildings host that students undergo vulnerability assessments. A 185-question form detailing the areas that should be evaluated will help in conducting the assessments. The results will highlight any areas in need of strengthening.

The Attorney General’s Office is offering grants to fund those reinforcements — about $10 million to schools in each year of the two-year program.

“The state now is basically blind on where school threats and vulnerabilities are,” Born said. “For example, someone says we should put up ballistic materials on the windows; we should put up video cameras; we should hire security guards. Yet when you do the walk-through, vulnerability and assessment vulnerability, you find out a few employees have duct-taped the back door open so they can go out and into backyards.”

“When these assessments, local school officials will get immediate guidance on safety gaps that need to be fixed,” Born said. “And Ohio’s going to get a complete picture of where our priorities should be, where we should spend money and what we should do to fix the problems.”

Law enforcement and assessment teams

The initiative stems from a promise Yost made in a 2018 letter to the U.S. Secret Service’s Terrorist Threat Assessment Center to bring a law enforcement officer to schools in each year of the two-year program. The plan is to have the training course available online in January; officials will have through June 30 to complete the course. The next, the officers will be asked to engage with school leaders to identify the formation of a Behavioral Assessment Team, as laid out in House Bill 123. Once the new fiscal year starts July 1, the school building vulnerability assessments could begin.

“This initiative sets forth a standardized, statewide framework to address prevention, intervention and training,” said Hartman, the school resource officer. “And it provides the much-needed funding to ensure all schools can benefit.”

The initiative stems from a promise Yost made in a 2018 when he was running for attorney general.

Local law enforcement and schools across Ohio have done the important work to get ready to save lives once a crisis begins,” Yost said.

“Now, what our state needs is the work that lets us stop the aggressor before the threat gets to the school,” he said. “We want to stop him before he ever starts planning.”

“We need to put just as much time and effort into preventing this.”

SCHOOLS

THREATS

**SCHOOLS**

**THREATS**

Continued from Page 1

These teachers, essential, said John Hartman, a school resource officer with the Delaware City Police Department and former vice president of the Ohio School Resource Officers Association.

“The overall safety of any school building is dependent on everyone,” said Hartman, who consulted on the initiative. “It’s not just law enforcement. It’s teachers, administrators, students, parents and officials all working together to be aware and informed.”

That is why the AG’s plan calls for the creation of multidisciplinary teams to evaluate threats or any concerning behaviors to determine whether they pose a risk.

The teams would focus on getting help for the student (or other individual) whose behavior is concerning, ideally well before the person thinks about planning an attack, said Mark Porter, who, as a former U.S. Secret Service official and Yost’s director of law enforcement operations, helped craft the initiative.

Said Hartman: “The key is having the training and resources in place beforehand, so threats can be identified and the proper individuals can receive intervention prior to acting.”

The program works hand-in-hand with training provided to schools and students by the Ohio Department of Education and the nonprofit Sandy Hook Promise, created after a gunman killed 20 schoolchildren in Connecticut in 2012.

“I don’t think anyone believes you’re going to prevent every bad thing in the world from happening,” said John Born, a former Ohio public safety director and former superintendent of the State Highway Patrol, who also served as a consultant on the new initiative.

“But we can prevent many bad things from happening,” he said. “And that’s when, fully implemented, this will be the most significant thing we’ve done in Ohio to prevent violent violence in schools.”

**How the initiative works**

The initiative has two segments, said Porter, who previously led the U.S. Secret Service’s Protective Intelligence and Assessment Division, which includes the National Threat Assessment Center.

In the first segment, every school district will be encouraged to create one or multiple Behavioral Assessment Teams, safety-minded groups that are encouraged to create one or multiple Behavioral Assessment Teams.

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Alliance Police Officer Roy Tittle has spent 21 years teaching students martial arts, a bid to help them be their best.

Along with his martial arts success, the youth has yellow belt, orange belt, green belt, purple belt. Carter, who recently turned 11. “Then you get the blue belt — a feat he accomplished by continuously practicing and testing,” he said.

Two years later, the program has helped kids find their way in a martial arts program for kids run by Police Officer Roy Tittle. Carter was 8 at the time, and school had always come easy for him, suddenly didn’t. “Every day before school, he didn’t want to go because he was being picked on,” said Staci Gurney, Carter’s mom. “He was being punched and kicked. It was heartbreaking.”

Her son immediately took to the Kick Drugs Out of Alliance program, begun more than two decades ago by Tittle and another officer. But Carter faced a big problem: One of his bullies was already enrolled.

“I went to see Mr. Tittle right away,” Gurney said. “And I said, ‘I just need you to know that one of the kids who is picking on my son is in your class.”

Mr. Tittle talked to the kid, and he made an announcement in class: “There is no tolerance for bullying in here, and if I find out it’s going on at school, it’s not going to be good.”

Two years later, the program has helped Carter rediscover his self-confidence. He is a purple belt who is already for his blue belt — a feat he accomplished by “continuously practicing and testing,” he said after a recent class, held in the gym of Rockhill Elementary School.

“I just want to start with the white belt,” said Carter, who recently turned 11. “Then you get the yellow belt, orange belt, green belt, purple belt. They make it hard to get to your next belt on purpose, so they know you’re ready.”

Along with his martial arts success, the youth has managed to turn that school bully into a friend.

“Carter came to the program dry and withdrawn,” said Tittle, an Alliance Police officer for almost 26 years, “and now he’s one of my best competitors.”

Gurney is proud of her son’s work and calls Kick Drugs Out of Alliance “an amazing program.”

Indeed, throughout its 21-year history, KDOA has helped hundreds of youngsters find their self-confidence, develop self-discipline and learn martial arts. Any student in kindergarten through 12th grade in Alliance City Schools can attend the twice-weekly classes free year-round, thanks in large part to Tittle’s fundraising.

The goal is to give children and teenagers, many of them from low-income families, the skills and self-worth to say no to drugs and gangs, said Tittle, who will be honored at the Law Enforcement Conference this month for his volunteer work.

Former Alliance Police Officer Jeff Helaney and Tittle started the program during a particularly rough time for the city.

“Our narcotics units and SWAT teams were endlessly working to get drugs off the street,” said Tittle, now 48 and a father of four. “So we were going to come into the schools and hit it from the other end by teaching kids a skill that teaches self-discipline and respect, and see if that would help in the community.”

In 1998, the year the program began, Alliance — a city of 21,980 residents about 20 miles northeast of Canton — ranked fifth nationally for crime per capita, Tittle said.

Now we’re not even on the charts,” he said. “We like to think we’re part of that.”

Marital arts — chung do kwan taekwondo, jujitsu and aikido — make up the core of the class. But Tittle and a handful of other instructors also talk about drugs, bullying, community safety — lessons kids need to stay safe and become leaders.

“We teach them schoolwork comes first,” Tittle said. “So if we have students who are falling back in school, we offer them tutoring.”

Karen Allen of North Canton drives her 15-year-old son, Logan, 30 minutes for the KDOA class. Because the family lives outside the school district, they pay $75 a year.

“The discipline, the fitness, the self-confidence,” she said, listing what her son gains from the program. “They’re learning a way of life — to keep working at something even when it’s hard and to find the benefit within.”

Logan, a blue belt, led a small group of younger kids in need.

“People say that the most advanced thing you can do is the basics consistently,” Thompson said. “His grabs are perfectly consistent every time, and when you combine that level of skill with the fact that he is a phenomenal instructor, he can see where that student is, what they need to know and say it in a way that they can understand.”

Put another way: “Mr. Tittle’s fun,” Logan said. Or, as Carter described him: “He’s a really good instructor.”

And Thompson’s assessment: “He’s the guy I want to be when I grow up.”

Police Officer Roy Tittle coaches students in the Kick Drugs Out of Alliance program. See more in a video at OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov.

The 31-year-old said that only partly in jest. He has looked up to Tittle since joining Kick Drugs Out of Alliance as a 10-year-old a few months after the program started.

“But he stuck with the program, and he’s going for his master’s rank soon, so he’s got a lot of dedication.”

Thompson, who also runs a martial arts school in Stirling, said, “The best thing I can do is pay forward what’s been paid into me, largely by Mr. Tittle.”

Seeing Thompson and other students succeed is “one of those things where, if you quit or you walk away, you’re walking away from a bunch of kids,” he said. “And I don’t want to see us fall backward, into the kids doing irresponsible things because they don’t have somebody to guide them.”

Tittle and Thompson ended the recent class standing before the doors or so kids on the competition team, some of whom would test for their next belt two days later.

“Have confidence in yourself. OK? Confidence is everything,” Tittle told the kids. “Not too much confidence. Don’t be ego-driven, but have confidence in your abilities. We watch you in class; you got this.”

“Yeah, sis,” the kids responded.

“We got a bunch of new students today,” Tittle went on. “So when you come in, make sure you’re welcoming them to the program. When you see them standing off to the side, make sure you’re getting them involved.”

“You’re the role models. All I do is push papers and make sure that everything’s paid for. All right? You guys are the ones who are going to be the examples for the new students. Got it?”

“Yes, sis,” “You make us proud,” he said. “Keep it up.”
Now available

Marijuana testing grants for felony cases

Attorney General Dave Yost is offering the Major Marijuana Trafficking Grant Program to reimburse law enforcement agencies that tap a private lab for marijuana analysis in first-, second- and third-degree felony cases.

The Bureau of Criminal Investigation has new equipment to measure THC levels, which became a necessity when Ohio legalized hemp this summer, but those tools won’t be ready until early next year.

In the meantime, agencies with major cases that rely on proving the confiscated drug is not hemp can apply for reimbursement for lab tests. Find out more through the link in OHLEG or at GrantsManagement@OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov.

By the numbers

The special report was undertaken after national media raised alarms about federal misuse of state facial-recognition programs. The Attorney General’s Office found no evidence that broad dragnets, mass surveillance or other illegitimate uses took place in Ohio.

But that doesn’t mean facial recognition works perfectly. Special training is being developed on the limitations of the technology. For the time being, all facial-recognition searches must be conducted via the Bureau of Criminal Investigation. Follow the instructions in OHLEG to request a search.

* Special report released in August; time frame for data is 2017-July 31, 2019.

11,070
Total inquiries conducted in Ohio’s facial-recognition system in the past three years, including 2,406 this year

418
Of those inquiries were made by federal officers

21M
Driver’s license images provided by the Ohio BMV in 2013

10,652
Of those inquiries were made by state and local officers

25,558
Active users in the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway, the electronic information network used to share criminal justice data among law enforcement agencies

24M
Images in the database