



**SAFE AND SOUND SCHOOLS**  
**P.O. BOX 173**  
**NEWTOWN, CT 04670**

August 27, 2020

Mr. Douglas J. Boyle  
Director – Fire Prevention and Building Safety Commission  
Indiana Department of Homeland Security  
Indiana Government Center – South, Room E208  
302 W. Washington Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Mr. Boyle,

My name is Michele Gay. I am a mom, a former public school teacher, and now a national school safety advocate. I am also co-founder of Safe and Sound Schools, a national non-profit organization comprised of Sandy Hook parents, educators, and community members and backed by school safety experts from all facets of the field. We founded Safe and Sound to honor our children and remember the classmates and educators who perished with them on December 14, 2012.

We chose to raise our families in Newtown, CT, a small town where crime is low and values are strong. We chose Sandy Hook Elementary School, a place of love, learning, and acceptance. When our children boarded their school buses and their teachers left for work on December 14th, we never imagined that it might be for the last time.

We all felt safe in our peaceful town and in our high-ranking schools. We learned, too painfully, that we were not. Gaining entry to our locked school—and access to our beloved children and teachers—was as simple as breaking a glass window.

Now I travel the country, to help school communities improve school safety in honor of my daughter, Josephine, and in memory of the other 19 children and 6 educators lost during the Sandy Hook School tragedy. I have learned a lot about life safety on this journey and I share this knowledge and my personal experience with school systems and professional groups across the country.

The most visible tools we have to protect our schools are doors. While doors may have originally served as a way to allow people to come and go, or help cut down on distractions outside the classroom, doors now play a key role in helping to keep our schools safe and secure. I see this visible and symbolic tool frequently



misused. Yes, doors are important in securing our buildings and classrooms, but too often, we see schools use devices and add-ons that actually put students and teachers at risk, rather than protecting them.

We need door locks to be easy to use for everybody, regardless of age, developmental level, ability, or disability. This means having locks at the right height and easy to operate with one smooth motion. To put it simply, if people have to practice or be trained to secure the door, it's just not simple enough. History has taught us that people trying to evacuate quickly under duress, especially in groups, can panic and quickly become trapped.

It is especially difficult for many of us looking for inexpensive, quick door security solutions to resist the temptation to install door barricade devices in public places, like our schools. While the intention of these additional devices is to give an added layer of security, they have the potential to introduce a host of unintended, negative consequences, such as enabling bullying, harassment, or much worse when added to public spaces.

At a school meeting I recently attended, a parent was excited to share a revelation with me: perhaps those door-jamming mechanisms in hotels – the ones that swing into place – could be an easy, affordable way to secure doors at schools.

While I love hearing from engaged parents and community members, as a school safety advocate, I had to explain why this type of solution actually puts students in danger, rather than protecting them. It broke my heart to dampen her enthusiasm, but I had to educate her about the importance of building and fire safety codes, Americans with Disabilities compliance, and unintended usage of barricade devices.

As a parent of a child with autism and apraxia and a parent who lost her daughter in an armed attack on her classroom, I understand on a deeply personal level the balance of providing for safety in times of extreme crisis as well as throughout the typical school day. It is our duty and obligation to recognize the needs of typical students and staff as well as disabled students and staff learning and working in our schools every day. For their safety, every day, our school buildings must comply with the ADA.

When secured properly, doors can be an effective barrier against a safety threat outside the school or classroom AND still allow individuals and groups of people to exit safely should their situation change like in a lockdown turned emergency evacuation. It is critically important that door safety design and practice support an all-hazards approach in order to keep student and staff safe under a variety of emergency scenarios.

I urge you – for the sake of our students and educators – to become informed about proper and safe door security. We have so much more work to do to educate parents, teachers, and the entire school community about door safety. Let's eliminate confusion and hone in on safety solutions that are legal, time-tested, and consider the all hazards approach recommended by Safe and Sound Schools, our federal partners, and many other school safety advocacy groups. It would be a mistake to focus on this one course of action as



there are many safer, proven, all hazards solutions available today. My organization, Safe and Sound Schools, was started to do just that!

I understand that the commission was developed to study and recommend school safety solutions. I wholeheartedly support this mission; yet, it appears that the commission has focused on barricade devices as the only solution. It would be a mistake to focus on this one course of action as there are many safer, proven, all hazards solutions available today. My organization, Safe and Sound Schools, was started to do just that!

Together we can make a difference. Together we can make our schools Safe and Sound. Please do not change the codes to allow these devices. Let's return to the work of finding solutions that are safe for all, all day, and every day.

Sincerely,

Michele Gay  
Co-founder/Executive Director Safe and Sound Schools