

Sheriff calls for metal detectors at schools

Bateman outlines safety ideas, including bulletproof doors

By PHIL DAVIS

pdavis@capgaznews.com

Anne Arundel County Sheriff Ron Bateman called Thursday for metal detectors, bulletproof doors and X-ray machines at all county schools, suggesting the measures as a response to the shooting at a Florida high school that killed 17 people last week.

Bateman, whose agency has no role in providing security for county schools, used social media to outline five changes he wants to see implemented as soon as possible.

Among them are the installation of metal detectors and X-ray machines at all schools, as well as retrofitting all classrooms with bulletproof doors.

The three-term sheriff, who is running for re-election, admitted during an interview Thursday afternoon that the changes would be costly but said solutions on

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See video of the sheriff discussing his ideas at capitagazette.com.

school safety so far have been implemented in a "half-baked way." The sheriff's office focuses on courthouse security and warrant service, although Bateman previously worked as a county police officer.

"I've been in this job for 38 years and there has never been a shooting at the circuit courthouse where I work," Bateman said. "And yet what do we have at our front door? We have magnetometers (and



THALIA JUAREZ/CAPITAL GAZETTE

Anne Arundel County Sheriff Ron Bateman discusses school safety measures Thursday and what he thinks should be done in the county, in light of the recent school shooting in Florida.

X-ray machines."

Bob Mosier, Anne Arundel County Public Schools spokesman, said Bateman has not spoken to school officials about his proposals. Instead, school officials are in See **SAFETY**, page A8

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talks with the county police department about potential changes.

He said the school system is "open to discussing anything that has the potential to enhance the safety" of students and staff.

The Feb. 14 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killed 17 students and faculty members.

Former student Nikolas Cruz, 19, has been charged with 17 counts of premeditated murder. Police have said he took an Uber to the school and, armed with an AR-15 rifle, started a rampage that lasted less than 10 minutes.

Since then, the nation has been involved in a passionate debate over gun control, school safety and other issues related to the shooting.

Mosier said some of Bateman's suggestions, particularly metal detectors and bulletproof doors, would be difficult. There are more than 82,000 students and more than 10,000 employees in buildings across the county.

Retrofitting county schools for such safety measures would cost millions of dollars and might make students feel uncomfortable rather than safe, Mosier said.

"Are you creating a welcoming environment in a school or are you creating a guarded facility/prison?" he said. "It's a difficult balance."

He added, "I think people appreciate the security that exists at the airport. But I don't think any of us would describe that experience as friendly."

Last week, schools Superintendent

George Ariotto outlined current safety measures at county schools. Those include locked doors, visitor ID checkpoints at entryways, safety drills and video security cameras.

Officers from the Annapolis, Fort George G. Meade and county police departments also provide school resource officers stationed at high schools and some middle schools.

Bateman said schools need to go "all-out" installing cameras that could be monitored throughout the day by law enforcement and having armed school resource officers at every school.

But he stopped short of endorsing an idea discussed by President Donald Trump and others, saying that arming teachers would not improve safety at schools.

"We are trained extensively in the police academy and then a minimum of twice a year we go through in-service training and we shoot daytime and reduced lighting at nighttime," he said. "Shooting is a difficult task to do and so that would require constant training."

"So I think it'd be best not to arm them just simply because of the training and the diversity you have with people's abilities," Bateman said. Children's safety should outweigh worries about the impact on the culture of schools that might be caused by bulletproof barriers and metal detectors.

He said he came up with the ideas while watching news about the Florida shooting while holding his 3-day-old grandson.

"As a grandparent where my granddaughters and grandson will be going to school soon, and my stepchildren are in school, I would feel more safe ... knowing that those things are in place and they're in a safe environment to learn," Bateman said.

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