

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

**Group: 3**

**Program: 1.6**

**Question No. AE15/109**

**Senator Wright asked the following question at the hearing on 27 March 2015:**

Senator WRIGHT: I want to ask questions about the Schools Security Program. If I have enough time I will go to the national counter-terrorism coordinator. There was an article, I think, in The Daily Telegraph on 2 March which said that more than 50 schools at risk of a terrorist attack around the country will be given security guards and closed-circuit TV systems amid heightened national-security fears. Is that assertion, or are those facts, part of the Schools Security Program? I am interested in investigating more about what that program is.

Ms K Jones: That announcement in that press release does specifically relate to the Schools Security Program, which is a program that we have funded over several years to support schools with a range of measures to increase security.

Senator WRIGHT: Is it right that more than 50 schools will be given security guards and closed-circuit TV systems as a result of national-security fears?

Ms K Jones: For each of the schools there are particular issues that may be relevant to them, whether it is because of the nature of the school, the location of the school, or the composition of the student bodies.

Senator WRIGHT: What process was used to assess schools at risk of terror attack?

Ms K Jones: In terms of the details of the process, if you do not mind, I need to take that on notice. The relevant people who are responsible for managing that program are not here at the moment, but I can take that on notice and provide full details.

Senator WRIGHT: Following on from that, what evidence is there that schools could be a target for a possible terrorist attack? What is the thinking behind this particular initiative or development?

Ms K Jones: In terms of the program, it is broader than schools being subject to a terrorist attack. There are a range of security issues that may be relevant to those schools. In terms of the information that is provided as part of the grant-assessment process, I would need to take that on notice and come back to you.

Senator WRIGHT: As you identified, the Schools Security Program is quite a long-running scheme.

Ms K Jones: Yes.

Senator WRIGHT: Were different measures used to assess security risks this time around?

Ms K Jones: I would need to take that on notice.

Senator WRIGHT: There is no-one here who can help me with those answers.

Ms K Jones: I apologise—no.

Senator WRIGHT: On notice, how was an increased terror threat factored into the decision-making process? In other words, how have things, developments, changed over recent times? I note that this is the first year that funding can be used to employ security guards. Why was that change made?

Ms K Jones: I would need to check that. I understand it was part of the election commitment of the government to broaden the program to enable security guards to be provided as part of the measures that schools could seek funding for, but I would like to confirm that for you.

Senator WRIGHT: Thank you, if you would do that. So was an increased terror threat factored into the decision-making process?

Ms K Jones: Certainly the general security environment was one relevant factor to considering both the program in general and in relation to each of the schools that applied. That general security context is relevant.

Senator WRIGHT: What evidence is there that these schools where a security guard is to be deployed would actually benefit by hiring guards? What evidential process has there been in making that decision?

Ms K Jones: Again, I would need to take that on notice.

Senator WRIGHT: In this funding round more than 80 per cent of the money has gone to independent schools. Is there any evidence to show that independent schools are 80 per cent more likely to be victims of attack, harassment or violence caused by racial or religious intolerance?

Ms K Jones: In terms of the specifics, because that is a very complex question I would not want to give a glib answer but I think one of the things that are relevant in relation to this program is that quite a lot of the schools are specialist religious schools, whether they are Islamic, Jewish and otherwise, and so they may for that reason have a heightened risk of attack, so that is one of the relevant factors in those circumstances.

Senator WRIGHT: Perhaps if the answer could indicate the breakdown and what the thinking or evidentiary basis was for the decision that was made. Also I said more than 50 was what was in the media report but how many schools are there? Are there 51, or more than that? Could you find that for me please?

Ms K Jones: I am happy to provide that.

Senator WRIGHT: Minister, I appreciate you are not the minister who can probably answer this at this point. This appears to have been characterised as an antiterror measure. How appropriate do you think it is that this issue around security at schools has been characterised as an antiterror measure?

Senator Scullion: You are right, I am not aware of the motivation that might have led to this but across governments one would think that you would move to secure a particular area of the community—in this case protecting our most vulnerable and sometimes most exposed. Clearly

this has been an area that has been analysed in terms of what level of threat that that would attract. There is no doubt that an attack on a school would probably have one of the greatest impacts in that it would terrorise our community and would make us very fearful. No doubt this has been identified as a consequence of a risk rather than anything else and I think that is quite appropriate.

Senator WRIGHT: I am interested. Can you confirm that applications for these security guards and enhanced security measures for these schools were made in September last year. Is that right? Can you take that on notice if you do not know?

Ms K Jones: I will confirm that for you.

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

**1. Senator WRIGHT: What process was used to assess schools at risk of terror attack?**

On 28 July 2014, the Minister for Justice, the Hon Michael Keenan MP, wrote to state and territory education ministers and independent schools associations requesting them to nominate schools that they considered should be invited to apply for funding under the Schools Security Programme. On 1 September 2014, the Attorney-General's Department invited only nominated schools to apply for funding.

**2. Senator WRIGHT: Following on from that, what evidence is there that schools could be a target for a possible terrorist attack? What is the thinking behind this particular initiative or development?**

Schools have reported attacks and harassment based on the racial or religious profile of their students.

The Schools Security Programme was a 2013 election commitment by the Government to work with schools at risk of attack, harassment or violence stemming from racial or religious intolerance through the provision of funding for security installations, such as lighting, fencing and closed-circuit television cameras, and for the cost of employing security guards.

**3. Senator WRIGHT: Were difference measures used to assess security risks this time around?**

No.

**4. Senator WRIGHT: On notice, how was an increased terror threat factored into the decision-making process? In other words, how have things, developments, changed over recent times? I note that this is the first year that funding can be used to employ security guards. Why was that change made?**

While the increased National Terrorism Public Alert Level was considered in the ability of the applicant to establish a risk, applicants also had to satisfy the other criteria set out in the Programme Guidelines.

The change to allow for the funding of security guards was made due to schools raising the need for the Programme to include the employment of security guards as well as the

installation of security infrastructure, following the last round of the Schools Security Programme.

5. **Senator WRIGHT: What evidence is there that these schools where a security guard is to be deployed would actually benefit by hiring guards? What evidential process has there been in making that decision?**

Applicants had to demonstrate the existence of a risk and how the employment of security guard/s would help to reduce this risk. The satisfaction of the other criteria in the Programme Guidelines was also taken into consideration in the assessment process.

6. **Senator WRIGHT: In this funding round more than 80 per cent of the money has gone to independent schools. Is there any evidence to show that independent schools are 80 per cent more likely to be victims of attack, harassment or violence caused by racial or religious intolerance? ... Perhaps if the answer could indicate the breakdown and what the thinking or evidentiary basis was for the decision that was made. Also I said more than 50 was what was in the media report but how many schools are there? Are there 51, or more than that? Could you find that for me please?**

Only schools nominated by state and territory governments and independent school associations were eligible to apply for funding. No funding agreements have yet been finalised.