

United States Senate

April 5, 2023

Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigations
935 Pennsylvania
Washington, DC 20535

Dear Director Wray,

I am writing to you today to express my deep concern about the recent increase in swatting attacks targeting schools in New York State and around the country. These attacks are a serious threat to the safety of our students and schools, and I urge you to immediately take all necessary steps to investigate and prevent them.

“Swatting” is an incident in which a fake phone call citing danger is made so that police SWAT teams respond to an unsuspecting resident’s home or other location like a school. Specifically, on Thursday, March 30, 2023 at least 36 K-12 school districts in New York State experienced swatting incidents over the course of a few hours, impacting over 220 New York schools. News reports indicate that these calls were similar in nature describing a fake active shooter at the schools.

When a school is targeted in a swatting attack, it often triggers a significant police response with heavily armed officers and tactical teams swarming the area, as it did in this instance, wasting thousands of dollars in police resources. These school disruptions can create chaos and panic and can put innocent people, including students, teachers, and staff, at risk of harm or injury. Schools are often evacuated and students are held in lockdown for hours. In some rare cases, these attacks have led to the death of innocent people because the diversion of law-enforcement resources to respond to a fake threat can result in response delays to real emergencies elsewhere in the community.

Moreover, swatting attacks against schools can have long-term psychological effects on those who are affected, particularly students and teachers who may feel traumatized by the experience. These recent incidents caused panic throughout the state. Almost a week after these attacks took place, we still have no clear idea who placed these calls or where they originated from. New York students, teachers, parents and communities deserve answers so they can feel safe once again in the classroom.

As the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, it is your responsibility to ensure that the citizens of this country are protected from such criminal activities. I am therefore calling for a full investigation into the recent swatting attacks in New York State and around the country. Last week, K-12 schools in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Iowa and other states were also targeted by similar swatting incidents. This fact suggests that these attacks are not isolated incidents, but rather part of a larger trend. With recent reporting that the March 30th incident in New York may

have involved “foreign actors,” a comprehensive federal investigation must take place with all due speed.

As you know, there are a number of reasons why foreign actors may launch swatting attacks in K-12 schools. Some foreign actors may do it to cause chaos and disruption in the United States. Others may do it to target specific individuals or groups. Still others may be trying to test the response of law enforcement to these types of attacks. The bottom line is that Americans need to know who is committing these attacks and why. Stopping this disturbing increase in attacks on our schools and communities is critical.

Furthermore, in light of the increasing frequency of swatting attacks, I am also calling on the FBI to start tracking swatting incidents as their own criminal offense and to release a report on any presently available data detailing the locations and volume of such incidents over the last ten years. The pervasiveness of these attacks must be properly assessed in order for us to prevent further threats going forward.

To better understand the nature of the threats presented by these swatting attacks, I request responses to the following questions:

1. Were the swatting attacks in New York committed by foreign or domestic actors?
2. Were the swatting attacks in New York committed by a single entity? Is there evidence to suggest that this was a coordinated effort?
3. Is there any connection between the swatting attacks in New York and the other recent swatting attacks in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Iowa and other states?
4. Over the last decade, swatting attacks have become increasingly prevalent. What data is the FBI collecting on these incidents?
5. Are we seeing an increase in these swatting attacks from foreign entities? Is there a particular foreign government or group behind these attacks?
6. How can the FBI work with states to more quickly address these incidents and hold those responsible accountable?

For these reasons, I urge you to use all of the resources at your disposal to swiftly identify the individuals responsible for these attacks and bring them to justice. The safety and security of our communities depend on it.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
U.S. Senator