

KYLE B. BUTLER
Prosecuting Attorney

Office of the Prosecuting Attorney
County of Ionia
State of Michigan

100 W. Main St.
3rd Floor Courthouse
Ionia, MI 48846
(616) 527-5302
Fax: (616) 527-8222

March 29, 2018

Dear Parents:

When our children learn of school shootings and similar threats, the overwhelming majority of them handle this news with appropriate and understandable worry and confusion. Unfortunately, others see this as an opportunity to cause more fear and chaos; some with the hopes of simply getting out of school for the day, others with the hope of getting some sort of peer notoriety.

There has been a notable rise across the nation, in our state, and even in Ionia County, of threats made to our schools and the students, teachers, and other professionals working to educate our children. Although many of the students that have created such situations claim they were just joking, or did not think it was a big deal—it is a big deal. That is why all the local law enforcement chiefs, all superintendents, the Sheriff, and I are reaching out to you. These threats are not viewed as a joke and these acts will not be tolerated.

Prior instances of such behavior have led to felony criminal charges including, but not limited to: Threat of Terrorism, False Threat of Terrorism, and Use of a Computer to Commit a Crime. The most serious of these crimes carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Sanctions imposed by the justice system are by no means the only consequences that can be suffered from this behavior. A student may lose a scholarship or federal aid. They may be denied college admission or entry into the armed forces. They may be required to disclose the situation on job applications. The unintended consequences for such behavior can be severe and lifelong.

We urge you to speak with your children about the power of their words—that what they say, even in jest, can have significant consequences for them. There is simply nothing funny about any shooting, let alone one that occurs in a school, and there is no appropriate time or place to joke about such events.

To be clear, such threats will be investigated by law enforcement and prosecuted in accordance with the law.

Respectfully,

Law Enforcement: Prosecutor Butler, Sheriff Miller, Ionia DPS Director Thomas, Belding Chief Nelson, Portland Chief Thomas, and Lake Odessa Sergeant Listerman.

Superintendents: Ron Wilson, Ionia Public Schools; Brent Noskey, Belding Area Schools; William Heath, Portland Public Schools; Randy Fleenor, Lakewood Public Schools; Jason Smith, Saranac Community Schools; Jeff Wright, Pewamo-Westphalia Community Schools; and Jason Mellema, Ionia County ISD.