



Statement on NSBA Request for Federal Assistance Regarding Threats and Acts of Violence

October 14, 2021—A recent action by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) is generating considerable comment in the press and on social media. The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) feels it is important to ensure our members understand the issue that has occurred as well as IASB's position.

On September 29, the Interim Executive Director and the President of NSBA sent a [letter](#) to President Biden to request federal law enforcement assistance to address a growing number of threats of violence or illegal intimidation occurring nationally to school boards and educators. While affirming the commitment of school boards to hear from their communities and the importance of free speech, the letter provided 20 instances of threats, harassment, disruption or intimidation as examples of the concerning trend. NSBA cited several laws that provide authority for federal intervention, and requested that a joint collaboration among federal law enforcement agencies, state and local law enforcement, and public school officials be undertaken to focus on these threats.

On October 4, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that the FBI and U.S Attorney's Offices have been directed to meet in the next 30 days with federal, state and local law enforcement leaders to discuss strategies to address threats, stating that the session will open dedicated lines of communication for threat reporting, assessment and response by law enforcement. The Justice Department also indicated it will launch additional efforts designed to address criminal conduct, and will create specialized training and guidance for local school boards and school administrators.

Organizations, individuals and some media outlets nationally have been highly critical of this effort. Most state the concern that the effort is intended to or will inhibit parental voice or advocacy with their school board. Many are citing language from NSBA's letter that states, "As these acts of malice, violence, and threats against public school officials have increased, the classification of these heinous actions could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism and hate crimes."

IASB's Position

IASB respectfully disagrees with NSBA's recent decision to request intervention from federal agencies and law enforcement, and the decision by NSBA leadership to tie the request to claims of domestic terrorism and hate crimes. NSBA did not consult IASB before it issued its request.

Iowa school boards value and care deeply about parent views on issues affecting children. School boards are providing forums for public opinion, including civil dissent, as part of full and fair deliberation on public issues. Iowans are largely highly civil, even in heated discussions of controversial issues.

Local law enforcement has been effective in addressing any isolated criminal threats or incidents, including violations of *Iowa Code 718.3* and *718.4* which relate to willful disturbance of public bodies and harassment of public officers and employees.

IASB government relations staff will be carefully monitoring the ensuing federal actions and working with our Congressional representatives to ensure that any federal action protects the rights of Iowa citizens to have a voice in their public schools. As always, IASB staff will also continue communicating with state lawmakers.

Questions from members may be directed to Lisa Bartusek, Executive Director.