

Officials call for more police in schools after shooting in suburban Maryland

By Nick Barrickman
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A school shooting in suburban Maryland Tuesday morning has prompted renewed calls by local officials for increased police presence at schools. At 7:55 a.m. Tuesday, 17-year-old Austin Wyatt Rollins pulled out a Glock semiautomatic handgun and opened fire at students at Great Mills High School as classes began. Days earlier, students at Great Mills had walked out of classes in opposition to the continued spate of school shootings.

The most recent school shooting, which injured two students—one critically—comes just days before Saturday’s scheduled “March for Our Lives” protest in Washington, DC, just an hour’s drive north from Great Mills High School. The demonstration and nationally coordinated sister marches are expected to draw hundreds of thousands of youth from across the country to protest gun violence.

At the time of the shooting, school resource officer Blaine Gaskill, a member of the local SWAT team, confronted Rollins, ordering him to “Put the gun down!” before opening fire at him. Rollins reportedly had held his handgun to his head in the moment before shots were fired, suggesting that he may have shot himself. He died after being taken to a hospital.

Local officials responded to the latest shooting and Gaskill’s reaction by heaping praise upon the officer for his “toughness” in the face of danger. According to St. Mary’s County Sheriff Timothy K. Cameron, there was “no question” Gaskill’s quick action had defused the situation. Larry Hogan, the Republican governor of Maryland, declared of Gaskill: “This is a tough guy who closed in quickly and took the right action,” before promising to plow resources into expanding the school resource officer program in Maryland.

“Having a trained, professional school resource officer made a difference ... armed school resource

officers are available in our high schools and that’s important,” stated Democratic Senator for Maryland Benjamin L. Cardin to the *Washington Post*.

The shooting came exactly a month after school officials responded to a mysterious Snapchat post warning of a shooting at Great Mills High School. According to an announcement sent out by the school principal, Jake Heibel, the school resource officer had determined “the threat was not substantiated.”

According to the *Post*, Gaskill is only the second school officer in the past 20 years to have successfully thwarted a school shooting that was in progress, raising questions about the effectiveness of armed personnel in addressing mass shooter situations. In contrast, school resource officers have regularly engaged in unprovoked physical confrontations with students, mirroring the growth in police brutality throughout the United States in recent years.

In preparation for this weekend’s “March for our Lives” event, officials in Washington, DC have announced that federal agents as well as the entire US Capitol Police Force will be monitoring the demonstrators. “As the young men and women from Parkland, Florida, have been preparing for Saturday’s event, the District has been preparing to keep them safe here in Washington,” declared DC’s Democratic mayor, Muriel Bowser to the *Post*.

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