

Va. transgender student separated from other youths in safety drill, mom says

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The superintendent of a Virginia school system has requested a review of safety procedures amid allegations that a transgender student was forbidden from entering a locker room during a middle school safety drill.

Students in the 14-year-old girl's physical education class in the Stafford County Public Schools were shepherded into the girls' or boys' locker room during the Sept. 28 drill. But the student was prevented from sheltering in either, according to the girl's mother and Equality Stafford, a group that advocates for LGBTQ rights in the county's schools. The drill was designed to simulate a lockdown that might happen if the school were threatened.

"It doesn't make me confident she'll feel very safe, should there be an actual emergency," said the girl's mother, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of safety concerns.

Teachers debated where to direct the student before having her sit in a hallway leading to the locker room, separate from her peers, the mother said. The girl, who changes for physical education class in a single-stall restroom, found the encounter "mortifying and embarrassing," her mother said.

The mother said she discussed the incident with Stafford Superintendent Scott Kizner, whom she described as concerned and receptive. The Stafford school system, about 45 miles outside the District, issued a statement saying it does not comment on individual incidents involving students but noted that Kizner requested a review of all protocols and procedures.

"We take such matters very seriously and they will be addressed," the statement read. "The welfare of all students is of the utmost importance."

On its Facebook page, Equality Stafford called the incident unacceptable, and the group protested the girl's treatment at a Tuesday night school board meeting.

"During an event that prepares children to survive an attack by actual assailants, she was treated as if she was so much of a danger to peers that she was left exposed and vulnerable," read the post, which amassed hundreds of comments and was shared more than 1,200 times.

The mother said the school system reviews transgender students' requests to use restrooms or locker rooms that align with their gender identity on a case-by-case basis. Her 14-year-old, she said, isn't allowed to use gender-specific facilities in her middle school.

The woman emphasized that she doesn't blame her daughter's P.E. teachers.

"This isn't on the teachers, and they are not the bad guys," the mother said. "The issue is the lack of policies and training."