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Dear Parents:

Recent tragic events involving school shootings have heightened all of our awareness. When students learn of these events on television or on social media, it is natural for them to worry about their own schools and their own safety. Unfortunately, some students see these tragedies as an open opportunity to gain notoriety and make threats against their schools, teachers and classmates. These same students then later claim their threats were simply a joke and that they were only playing a prank.

In the last year, my office has received multiple reports from law enforcement agencies of students using social media and other means to make threats against our schools. I want to be very clear that: **these threats are *not* jokes -- they are crimes.** The Lapeer County Prosecutor's office will hold individuals accountable who commit these crimes. Threats or false reports of terrorism are separately defined as 20-year felonies. To be convicted, a person must simply threaten an act of terrorism and communicate that threat to another. Most importantly, MCL 750.543m(2) provides that, "[i]t is *not* a defense that the [student] did not have the intent or capability of carrying out the threat of terrorism."

Still too many of us want to think that this kind of crime could never happen in our hometown(s), but it is real and any threat to "shoot up" our schools must be taken seriously. I urge you to talk to your children about the appropriate use of social media and the *real* consequences of making threats against our children in our schools. Please stress that there is nothing humorous about threatening to "shoot up" our schools and killing our children. By working together, we can provide our children with the safe schools they deserve.

Sincerely,


MICHAEL J. SHARKEY
Lapeer County Prosecuting Attorney