



What is the Clery Act?

The federal law known as the Clery Act is credited with bringing improvements to campus safety, even as sexual assault and gun violence remain major concerns. Supporters of the law plan to mark its 25th anniversary next month.

Here are some questions and answers about the law, at a time when many are debating safety as campus shootings become more frequent:

Q: Why was the law originally passed?

A: Connie and Howard Clery pushed for the law following the 1986 rape and slaying of their 19-year-old daughter in her Lehigh University dorm room. The Clerys and other supporters of the law argued that college administrators were not doing enough to warn and inform students and their families about crimes that occurred on campuses.

Q: What does the law do?

A: Signed into law in 1990, the law requires colleges and universities to publish and distribute annual reports that disclose their security policies and statistics about how often different kinds of crimes, from murder to burglary, occur on campus. Colleges also are required to warn students and employees about crimes that might pose a threat and maintain a daily, written log of crimes that are reported to police or security officials.

Q: Lawmakers have added additional requirements over the years. How was the law changed in 2008 after the Virginia Tech shooting?

A: Congress amended the law to require colleges to immediately warn the campus community about any "significant emergency or dangerous situation," which often is done through text messages and email alerts. The changes also required colleges to publicize their emergency response and evacuation plans, and to test them at least once a year.

Q: What does the act say about planning for an active shooter on campus?

A: The law itself is silent, but campuses typically include such a scenario in their emergency response plans. Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education says the law's emergency planning and notification requirements would include situations ranging from an armed intruder to a tornado or gas leak.

Q: What are the penalties for not complying with the law?

A: Colleges can be fined up to \$35,000 per violation, and a number have faced penalties in recent years after federal reviews.

Q: What impact has the Clery Act had?

A: Supporters, including a nonprofit founded by the Clery family, say the law has helped get students to safety during emergencies, allowed countless parents and students to have access to detailed information about crime, and helped give crime victims greater rights and protections.

Q: What do critics of the law say?

A: U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Missouri, said earlier this year that the Clery Act should be simplified or replaced altogether, calling it a "mess" that requires too much paperwork and sometimes accomplishes little.

New York Times Article October 10, 2015