

EDUCATION

Ohio State president announces additional \$20 million over 10 years to fund safety measures

[Sheridan Hendrix](#) The Columbus Dispatch

Published 3:08 p.m. ET Sept. 24, 2021 | Updated 7:48 p.m. ET Sept. 25, 2021

From behind the podium at an on-campus news conference Friday afternoon, Ohio State President Kristina M. Johnson spoke firmly about her feelings toward the recent increase in violent crimes around campus.

"This is personal for me," she said. "There is nothing I take more personally than student safety."

It's with that conviction that Johnson announced Ohio State is investing an additional \$2 million a year in funding over the next decade to enhance safety and security measures on and off campus. The funding, effective immediately, will total at least \$20 million.

The additional funding will go toward increasing off-campus patrols, including more private security, uniformed officers and joint patrols; additional mobile lighting and camera towers in the area, and extending the university's ride share services for students into the Short North.

Johnson said Ohio State will also work with the College of Social Work and the John Glenn College of Public Affairs to create a more holistic approach and provide additional resources.

Ohio State safety: Columbus, Ohio State police departments step up safety measures in University District

Funding for the additional safety measures will be taken from elsewhere in the university's current budget, Johnson said, adding that "we will need to flexible."

Columbus mayor Andrew Ginther supports funding

Columbus Mayor Andrew J. Ginther joined Johnson at Friday's press conference and said he shared the president's frustration over "a violent crime scourge" that has been affected individuals across the country.

Since the beginning of fall semester, Johnson and other university officials have regularly addressed enhancing safety measures on and around campus.

In late August, Johnson sent an email to the Columbus campus community about increased security measures being taken on and off campus. The measures include light towers and cameras that will be added along pedestrian pathways. There also will be security provided by the Community Crime Patrol and marked security vehicles.

A few days later, Columbus and Ohio State's police departments announced they were shifting resources to the University District and providing additional safety measures to address safety concerns.

Columbus Police Commander Dennis Jeffrey said the University District has seen a 51% decrease in violent crimes -- which include robberies, aggravated assaults and burglaries -- since the partnership's announcement on Sept. 1.

But many parents of Ohio State students say the university still isn't doing enough to protect their children.

Ohio State news: Parents express concern after rash of crimes opened Ohio State fall semester

Chase Meola's death spurred Ohio State task forced to be formed

Billboards along Route 315 near Ohio State's campus were recently installed by Buckeyes for a Safe Ohio State, a parent advocacy group that formed last year following the shooting death of 23-year-old Chase Meola at an off-campus party in October 2020.

The billboards include images of Meola and phrases like "One is too many. Ohio State protect your students from violent crime." and "College should not be a crime scene!"

Several recent Buckeye Safety Alerts have also rattled parents and students.

In the early morning hours Friday, officers responded to a drive-by shooting at a home near Tuller Street and Woodruff Avenue. A group of men tried to enter a house party but were asked to leave. A few minutes after leaving, a black vehicle pulled up in front of the home and fired multiple shots toward the house before driving away. No injuries were reported.

Ohio State formed a safety task force in the wake of Meola's death and proposed more than a dozen new safety and security recommendations, including expanding surveillance camera coverage off-campus, increasing university police staffing and evaluating lighting in off-campus neighborhoods.

Johnson said the university invested \$1 million in safety measures since Meola's death but noted, "It's not enough; we need more."

Chase Meola: Here's what Ohio State safety task force recommends following death of student Chase Meola

"Last night's event were tragic and we don't want them to happen again," Johnson said of the drive-by shooting.

Johnson said the safety measures announced Friday have been in the works since she arrived on campus more than a year ago.

shendrix@dispatch.com

@sheridan120