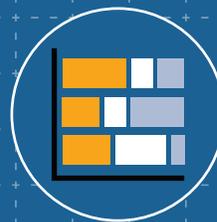


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# STATE LEGISLATION TO EXPLORE OR ESTABLISH SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINES

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States invest in school safety prevention strategies through the adoption of anonymous and confidential tip line reporting programs



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# SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINES: PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL SAFETY

School safety continues to be a key priority for educators, policymakers, and communities across the United States. In 2018, about 836,100 student victimizations occurred at, or on the way to or from, school. In the 2018–2019 school year, there were 66 reported school shootings that resulted in casualties at public and private elementary and secondary schools, including 29 incidents that resulted in at least one death.<sup>1</sup>

Studies of the characteristics of school-based shootings have found that, before many school shooting incidents, other people were concerned about the behaviors of the perpetrators and some even knew of the planned attack.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of those who had prior knowledge of the plan were peers, including siblings, friends, and schoolmates.<sup>3</sup> Reasons for not reporting this information varied, but proposed prevention strategies emphasized providing students with an anonymous reporting system.

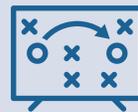
School tip lines are one avenue of reporting that may facilitate the sharing of concerns and prior knowledge of violence or threats that extend beyond routine disciplinary or behavioral problems or conflicts between students. A school safety tip line is a comprehensive communication system designed to provide students, school personnel, or other members of the public with a safe and anonymous or confidential way to report a threat or potential threat to student or school safety, thereby equipping authorities with the information needed to respond to threats and avert tragedy. Anonymous or confidential reporting systems can be a critical component of a comprehensive school safety approach, which should also include strategies

**A school safety tip line is one component of a comprehensive approach to promote school safety, along with other approaches that seek to enhance security, prepare response systems, assess possible threats, and support student well-being.**



## Physical Security

- Armed school personnel
- Technology to control or monitor access to school property
- School resource officers



## Protocols/Drills

- Emergency response plans
- Emergency drills
- Response protocols
- School safety audits



## Receive/Assess Threats

- School tip lines
- Threat assessment teams
- Risk assessments



## Supportive Services

- Student behavior modification
- Suicide prevention
- Mental health services
- School safety centers

to promote physical safety, emergency response, threat assessment, and support services for students.

Funded by the National Institute of Justice, the Assessment of National and State Tip Line Technology as a Strategy for Identifying Threats to School Safety project, which supported the preparation of this brief, sought to explore the implementation of school safety tip lines (Award No. 2017 CK-BX-0004). According to the recent, nationally representative survey conducted under this NIJ-funded project, just over half (51%) of public middle and high schools in the United States currently have tip lines in operation.<sup>4</sup> Principals reported that they believed the tip lines to be an effective strategy to address multiple threats to school safety, and more than 50% of principals in schools with tip lines reported that the tip lines had prevented violent incidents. Of schools without tip lines, 26% reported that the school had an insufficient budget to implement and operate a tip line and 21% reported that the school had insufficient staff to implement and operate a tip line.

Many states across the country have supported the implementation of school safety tip lines by passing laws that authorize or require the establishment of reporting systems through which students, staff, and members of the wider community can report potentially harmful, violent, or criminal activities that threaten school safety and student well-being. Although legislation is not required in order for schools to establish and then implement school safety tip lines, such legislation can be helpful in launching, and in some cases streamlining, the establishment of a tip line in schools across the state. In the absence of a state law requiring it, some schools within a state may not otherwise establish and implement a school safety tip

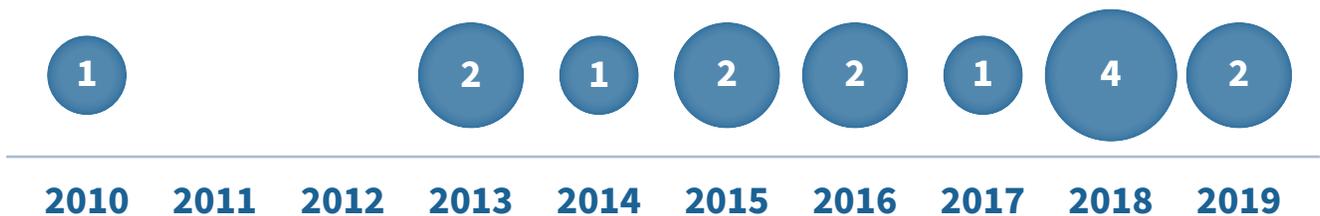
line. This brief summarizes state laws passed from 2010 through 2019 that establish school safety tip lines.<sup>5</sup>

We identified 15 states that enacted or adopted codified state laws that require or authorize the creation of school safety tip lines<sup>6</sup> (see **Exhibit 1**). Under state laws that require the creation of a tip line, there is a designated state or local-level entity that is tasked with developing or maintaining the tip line. By contrast, under state laws that simply *authorize* the creation of a tip line, a particular state or local-level entity is allowed or encouraged to create a tip line, but the development or implementation of the tip line is not mandated.

An additional three states have passed codified laws that explicitly explore the feasibility of creating a statewide school safety tip line.

The policy analysis described below is limited to state laws that explicitly<sup>7</sup> authorize or require schools to create tip lines that can receive tips of potential threats to school safety through a website, mobile application, or other mechanism of an actual or perceived threat or danger to school safety.<sup>8</sup> State laws are included in the analysis only if each of these components is explicitly specified in the law. We additionally included state laws that require anonymous or confidential<sup>9</sup> reporting of potential threats to school safety, but this was not a required element of our inclusion criteria. We excluded state laws that solely implied the existence of reporting procedures or protocols, or established tip lines specifically for the purpose of identifying threats against an individual as opposed to threats against school safety. We included in our legal research state laws that authorize or require the creation of a school safety tip line, by either requiring

**Exhibit 1. Number of States That Have Passed Laws Requiring or Authorizing the Creation of School Tip Lines**







# CHARACTERISTICS OF STATE LEGISLATION ESTABLISHING SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINES

» **Establishes a Statewide Tip Line:  
12 States**

- Colorado
- Indiana
- Florida
- Kentucky
- Maryland
- Michigan
- Nevada
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Utah
- Wyoming

» **Establishes a Tip Line for a Subset of Schools:  
3 States**

- Illinois
- Missouri
- North Carolina

As noted above, 15 states enacted laws that established school safety tip lines (see sidebar). In these 15 states, we analyzed the laws for whether they included one or more elements that stakeholders may consider when establishing a comprehensive school safety tip line. Some components of a comprehensive school safety tip line that may be established through state law include which entity or professional is charged with administering the tip line, how the tip line is to operate, and whether funding has been allocated to implement or maintain the tip line.<sup>13</sup> Throughout this document, we will reference elements of the state laws in the 12 states with laws that establish statewide tip lines, the three that establish tip lines for a subset of schools, and the combined 15 states.



## Entity responsible for administering the tip line

State laws were analyzed to determine which agency, organization, or office was charged with creating, maintaining, and reporting on activities related to the tip lines. The specific entity the law assigns to house and administer the school tip line varies among the states (**Exhibit 3**).

The largest number of states with laws establishing statewide school safety tip lines charged either the state Attorney General’s office or the state law enforcement or homeland security department with administering the tip line. Other entities charged with operating tip lines include state school safety centers or school security institutes, state education departments, the governor’s office, and a research institute.

Laws in the three states that established tip lines in a subset of schools generally assigned administration of the tip lines to individual entities or governing bodies of the subset of schools identified. In Missouri, each individual college or university in the state was charged with administering the tip line; in North Carolina, the governing body of each secondary public school has the responsibility for the tip line. Illinois, unlike other states with tip line-establishing laws, charged two entities with administering the tip line for Chicago Public Schools: the Chicago Board of Education and the Chicago Police Department.

## Tip line operations

Authorized users of the reporting system and the means by which they can submit tips are sometimes, but not always, specified in law. For example, Oregon law states that its school safety reporting system should allow for the submission of tips via telephone calls, text messages, and a mobile device application, as well as electronically through the internet (Or. Admin. R. 257-095-0030 (2020)). **Exhibit 4** summarizes what reporting options are explicitly required or mentioned in state laws that establish statewide tip lines, as well as what has been implemented according to a review of each state’s public website.<sup>14</sup>

**Exhibit 3. Entity Responsible for Administering the Tip Line, as Identified in State Legislation**

<b>State Attorney General’s Office</b>
<b>Colorado, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming</b>
<b>State Law Enforcement or Homeland Security Department</b>
<b>Indiana, Florida, Kentucky, and Oregon</b>
<b>Governor’s Office</b>
<b>Maryland</b>
<b>State Education Agencies/Departments</b>
<b>Nevada</b>
<b>Higher Education/Research Institute</b>
<b>Utah</b>
<b>State School Safety Center/Security Institute</b>
<b>Oklahoma</b>

**Exhibit 4. Explicit Requirements in State Laws Establishing Statewide Tip Lines**

State Website & Statutory Reference	Legislative and Regulatory Language: Format Accepted	Implemented Formats According to Websites				
		Phone	Web	App	Text	Email
<b>Michigan</b> Mich. Comp. Laws Serv. § 388.1767b (LexisNexis 2020)	Phone number that transmits voice, text, photographic, and other messages and information					
<b>Oregon</b> Or. Rev. Stat. § 339.329 (2020); Or. Admin. R. 257-095-0000 (2020) et seq.	Telephone calls, text messages, electronically through the internet, and an application on a mobile device					
<b>Nevada</b> Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. 388.1455 (LexisNexis 2020) et seq.	Phone call, website, mobile telephone application, and text messaging application					
<b>Colorado</b> Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-31-606 (2020)	Not specified					
<b>Maryland</b> Md. Code Regs. 01.01.2018.21 (2020)	Electronic tip system					
<b>Pennsylvania</b> 24 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 13-1303-D (2020) et seq.	Not specified					
<b>Utah</b> Utah Code Ann. § 53B-17-1202 (LexisNexis 2020) et seq.	Not specified					
<b>Wyoming</b> Wyo. Stat. Ann. § 9-1-603 (2020)	Not specified					
<b>Kentucky</b> Ky. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 158.4451 (LexisNexis 2020)	Phone call, e-mail, mobile device application					
<b>Oklahoma</b> Okla. Stat. tit. 74, § 51.2d (2020)	Telephone tip line					
<b>Indiana</b> Ind. Code Ann. § 10-21-1-4.5 (LexisNexis 2020)	Application					
<b>Florida</b> Fla. Stat. § 943.082 (LexisNexis 2020)	Application compatible with Android and iPhones					

Notes: States are listed in order of most to fewest number of formats implemented. Links to state tip line websites were reviewed and active as of July 6, 2020. Information gathered from public websites for each school safety tip line.

Ten of the states in **Exhibit 4** specifically note on their websites that their tip lines are **set up to receive reports 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**.<sup>15</sup> Only three of those states, however—Michigan, Nevada, and Utah—have language in their state laws that require continuous access to their tip lines. For instance, Nevada requires the support center to “be available to receive reports and notifications and staffed with trained personnel 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays and other days when school is not in session” (Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 388.14557 (LexisNexis 2020)). In states where the laws do not require the tip lines to be continuously operational, the reporting system may be staffed only Monday–Friday during regular business hours.

Of the 15 states with laws explicitly creating tip lines through legislation or regulation, 14 have language specifying that **reporting to the tip lines is to be anonymous or confidential**.<sup>16</sup> The language in Michigan’s, Oregon’s, and Wyoming’s laws specifies that efforts should be made to keep caller information confidential, while also equipping responders to follow up with callers, if necessary. For example, Oregon’s law specifies rules supporting that the tip line must include “provisions that protect the personally identifiable information of a person reporting information without compromising opportunities for follow-up contact from local law enforcement contacts or service providers to provide further information to or obtain further information from the person” (Or. Rev. Stat. § 339.329.3a (2020)).

**Coordination or communication with appropriate entities, such as local law enforcement entities or public safety officials**, about tips is specified in all 12 states that have laws establishing statewide tip lines. In addition, Illinois’s legislation specifies coordination with law enforcement to operate the Chicago Public Schools’ tip line. Some states offer further guidance within their state laws. For example, Pennsylvania mandates that procedures be established for how information will be forwarded to the “appropriate law enforcement agency, school official or organization, as determined by the office” (24 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 13-1303-D (2020)).

Some state laws that establish school safety tip lines **explicitly include reports of criminal activity in addition to reports about concerns or threats of harm and violence**. For example, Colorado’s Safe2Tell program is required to “establish and maintain methods of anonymous reporting concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities in schools or the threat of those activities” (Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-31-606 (2020)). Florida’s FortifyFL tip line has a similar mandate: “The department shall competitively procure a mobile suspicious activity reporting tool that allows students and the community to relay information anonymously concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities, or the threat of these activities, to appropriate public safety agencies and school officials” (Fla. Stat. Ann. § 943.082 (LexisNexis 2020)).



*Of the 15 states with laws explicitly creating tip lines through legislation or regulation, 14 have language specifying that reporting to the tip lines is to be anonymous or confidential.*

Missouri’s tip line is intended to capture certain types of specified threats, such as those “concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities, or the threat of such activities” (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 173.1200 (2020)). North Carolina’s tip line is designed to receive “anonymous information on internal or external risks to the school population, school buildings, and school-related activities” (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-105.51 (2020)). Illinois requires the Chicago hotline to accept “anonymous phone calls for information that may prevent violence” (105 Ill. Comp. stat. Ann. 5/34-21.8 (LexisNexis 2020)).



## Reporting requirements

The states of Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nevada,<sup>17</sup> Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming have included public **reporting requirements** in their laws establishing their school safety tip lines.<sup>18</sup> These reports cover a variety of data points, but they most often include the number and types of tips received in a given year (**Exhibit 5**). While not required, a report may also cover the volume of tips by day of the week, the methods used to submit tips, how tips are reported, and the outcome or disposition of the reported incidents.

## Exhibit 5. Examples of Reporting Metrics in Selected States

Annual reports for 2018–2019 were available online from five states:<sup>19</sup> Colorado, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming.<sup>20</sup> These reports include information such as the following.

### » The number and type of reports received.

Colorado, Michigan, and Wyoming noted suicidal threats as the top type of tip received, with other top categories including the same three tip types: drugs, bullying, and self-harm.<sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania and Oregon’s top tip type was bullying or cyber-bullying.<sup>22</sup> Two states, Colorado and Wyoming, report on number of tips received by day of the week, finding that Tuesday–Thursday were days with higher tip counts; Oregon’s report notes that the day of the week with the most tips was Thursday.<sup>23</sup>

### » How reports are submitted.

Colorado, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming present how often each method is used. In general, the most common methods used were web or mobile browsers, except in Pennsylvania, where the vast majority of reports came through their mobile application (83%).<sup>24</sup> Telephone was the least common method used, with less than 10% of total reports in every state except Colorado, which reported that 23% of its reports were received by phone.<sup>25</sup> Michigan’s annual report does not provide further detail on the methods used to report but notes increases in the use of the web and mobile app after updates (130% and 9%, respectively).<sup>26</sup>

### » Response to reports received.

Michigan’s annual report is distinct from the others in that it includes the outcomes for approximately a third of tips received. Most commonly these reported outcomes involved notification of parents (60%), further monitoring of the situation (37%), or engagement in school counseling (35%). Although rare, 50 tips (3%) resulted in confiscations of weapons.<sup>27</sup>

## Resources to support tip line implementation

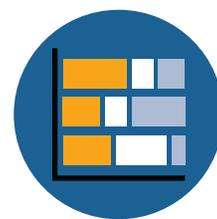
Although many state legislatures have appropriated funding to broadly support school safety—through establishing school safety centers, implementing school safety plans, or generally promoting and conducting school efforts—in their laws that authorized and established the tip lines, only four states designated state funding specifically for the purpose of supporting the tip lines (see **Exhibit 6**).

Other states have not appropriated a specific amount of funding, but rather created avenues for monies to be routed to support the establishment and operation

of the legislatively created tip lines. For instance, the state of Michigan created the “student safety fund” within the state’s treasury (Mich. Comp. Laws Serv. § 752.917 (LexisNexis 2020)), Nevada established the “SafeVoice Program Account” from the state general fund (Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. 388.1457 (LexisNexis 2020)), and Colorado created the “Safe2Tell Cash Fund” (Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-31-610 (2020)). Therefore, the funding for the creation or maintenance of a tip line is dependent on whether the state has appropriated monies. In Indiana, a school corporation can apply to the board of education for a grant that offsets the costs of creating an “active event warning system” (Ind. Code Ann. § 10-21-1-4.5 (LexisNexis 2020)). School safety tip lines may also be supported by relying on existing systems.

**Exhibit 6. States Designating Funding Specifically for the Purpose of Supporting Their Tip Lines Through the Authorizing Laws**

State	Amount	Frequency	State Laws Designating the Scope of Funding
<b>Oregon</b>	\$1,000,000	One-time	“To establish and operate the tip line” (2016 Or. Laws 74)
<b>Florida</b>	\$300,000 \$100,000	One-time Recurring	“Appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Department of Law Enforcement to competitively procure proposals for the development or acquisition of the mobile suspicious activity reporting tool pursuant to s. 943.082, Florida Statutes” (2018 Fla. Laws 3)
<b>Utah</b>	\$1,770,000	Recurring	From the state’s education fund to the University of Utah for the purpose of operating its SafeUT Crisis Text and Tip Line (2019 Utah Adv. Legis. Serv. 446 (LexisNexis)).  University Neuropsychiatric Institute is not allowed to “charge a fee to the State Board of Education or a local education agency for the use of the SafeUT Crisis Line”; however, the Institute is allowed to charge an institution of higher education for use of the SafeUT Crisis Line (Utah Code Ann. § 53B-17-1204 (LexisNexis 2020)).
<b>North Carolina</b>	\$5,000,000	One-time	Appropriated during the 2018–2019 fiscal year for the creation and implementation of its tip line (2018 N.C. Sess. Laws 5)



# STATE LAWS TO EXPLORE THE CREATION OF A SCHOOL SAFETY TIP LINE

In addition to the 15 states previously discussed, three states have passed state laws to explore the creation of tip lines through feasibility or pilot studies: Arizona, Arkansas, and Connecticut. The laws in each of these states further specify the entity responsible for conducting the tip line feasibility assessment:

- **Arizona:** Department of Education (enacted May 18, 2016)<sup>28</sup>
- **Arkansas:** University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Psychiatric Research Institute (enacted April 16, 2019)<sup>29</sup>
- **Connecticut:** Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (enacted June 13, 2014)<sup>30</sup>

The Arizona legislature was interested in determining where the tip line should be housed, estimating the cost of the program, and evaluating how tip lines have been implemented in other states. Connecticut’s law further assesses referral entities, training for operators, other state tip lines, and legal issues related to tip line administration. No report or further information on the findings of the feasibility initiative in Arizona could be located through internet searches.

In 2019, the Arkansas state legislature passed legislation to create the pilot program implementing the “AR Safe Schools” tip line, citing a survey administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that noted that Arkansas reports some of the highest numbers of school safety incidents in the nation<sup>31</sup> (Ark. Code Ann. § 6-18-111 (2020)). Previously, Arkansas had legislated that all public schools have a panic button alert system (2015 Ark. Acts 950). In the 2019–2020 school year, that requirement was met through the Rave Panic Button

system in all public schools, according to a July 2019 memorandum from the commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education.<sup>32</sup> The same memo stated that the Rave resources available to public schools would now include Rave Eyewitness, a school tip line for anti-bullying. Arkansas’ definition of bullying has remained unchanged since its original passage in 2007: bullying is the “threat or incitement of violence by a student against another student or public school employee.”<sup>33</sup>

In regard to funding, Arkansas established the “ARSafeSchools Fund” for the creation and maintenance of the school safety tip line, which consists of revenue from “(1) Moneys obtained from private grants or other sources that are designated to be credited to the fund; and (2) Any other funds authorized or provided by law” (Ark. Code Ann. § 6-18-112 (2020)). Part of this funding must be used to train staff in the operation and maintenance of the school safety tip line (Ark. Code Ann. § 6-18-111 (2020)).



# CONCLUSION

**Future research may explore what processes these entities have implemented and how effective they have been to inform future programming and new state-level law.**

The number of states that have authorized or required the creation of school safety tip lines through legislation and regulation has doubled in recent years, specifically since the Parkland shooting. Many of these state laws require coordination among various departments at the local and state level without specifying processes. Future research may explore what processes these entities have implemented and how effective they have been to inform future programming and new state-level law. As many tip lines are established without any corresponding funding for implementation or enforcement, more research is needed to identify how they are resourced and to assess the long-term sustainability of these funding sources.



# ENDNOTES

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- 5 All state laws were identified by applying the following two Boolean search strings within the LexisNexis statutes and regulations databases for all 50 states and the District of Columbia: **Search String #1:** text (school! or education! Or instruction! /40 (report! or app! or tip! or safe! or mobile or info! /8 line or tool or system or report! or activity) /50 safe! or suspicious! or suspect! or dangerous! /6 activity or behavior! or act!). **Search String #2:** text (anonym! or mobile or tip or info! or safe! or crisis or unsafe /35 report! or anonym! or tip or “tip line” /29 (suspicious! or harm! or danger! or violen! or criminal! or threat! /7 act! or behavior) /100 school! or education!) and not heading (compact or offender or correctional or workplace). All laws are current as of May 17, 2020
- 6 The following states mentioned school safety tip lines only within the context of appropriated funding: **California** (per 2002 Cal Stat. 42); **Kansas** (per 2019 Kan. Sess. Laws 68; 2015 Kan. SB 7; 2013 Kan. S.B. 171; 2011 Kan. Sess. Laws 118; 2009 Kan. Sess. Laws 124; 2010 Kan. Sess. Laws 165; 2007 Kan. Sess. Laws 167; 2005 Kan. Sess. Laws 174; 2004 Kan. Sess. Laws 123; 2001 Kan. Sess. Laws 144; 2000 Kan. Sess. Laws 130; 1999 Kan. Sess. Laws 160); **Washington State** (per 2002 Wash. Sess. Laws 371; 2003 Wash. Sess. Laws 10); **West Virginia** (per 2006 W. Va. Adv. Legis. Serv. 6). These appropriations laws were identified by applying the following Boolean search string in the LexisNexis session law database of all 50 states and the District of Columbia: text (appropriate or appropriation or fund! or revenue or money or dollar or account /30 (“tip line” or “tipline” or “hotline” or “safevoice” or “safe voice” or “safe-to-tell” or “safe2tell” or (anonymous! or confidential! or suspicious! /8 report! or tip! or tool) or “saferoh” or “school safety and crisis line”). To be counted here, the laws have to explicitly meet the inclusion criteria specified above, by directly stating these requirements or elements in the text of the law. Note that here and throughout this brief, all session laws, statutes, regulations, and regulatory text documents are generally formatted according to the BlueBook citation style.
- 7 This brief did not include states such as Tennessee, which imply the existence of reporting procedures or protocols through the creation of a threat assessment team but do not actually mention or require the creation of a reporting mechanism that is capable of receiving tips of perceived or actual threats to school safety. Tenn. Code § 49-6-2701 (2020); La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 17:410 (2020).



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