
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

House Appropriations Committee

HOUSE BILL 157: Public Schools – Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures – Increase (School Safety Enhancement Act of 2024)

DATE: JANUARY 30, 2024

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems and reducing barriers to learning for ALL students. CRSD is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of all students, including pregnant or parenting students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status. CRSD opposes HB 157, which increases the annual appropriation to the Safe Schools Fund from \$10 million to \$20 million for school resource officers (SROs) and law enforcement coverage in public schools.

Current law already requires that \$10 million per year be appropriated to the Safe Schools Fund specifically for SROs and law enforcement coverage in schools. A recent state audit of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) finds that these funds aren’t being managed appropriately or fully used.¹ The audit reported a “significant deficiency in the design or operation of internal control that could adversely affect MCSS’ ability to maintain reliable financial records, operate effectively and efficiently, and/or comply with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.”² Specifically, the state audit found that “MCSS did not ensure School Resource Officer (SRO) grant payments were properly supported and subject to independent review.”³

The audit further found:

- “MCSS did not obtain documentation to support the propriety of payments made to grantees and to ensure the grantees only claimed allowable costs.”⁴
- “An audit test of 18 payments totaling \$2.3 million made to 8 grantees during the period from July, 2021 to April, 2022 disclosed that all 18 lacked sufficient supporting documentation.”⁵
- “For one payment to an LEA totaling \$902,000, MCSS only received payroll reports for 13 employees with gross earnings totaling \$593,000. MCSS was not aware that

¹ “Maryland Center for School Safety.” *General Assembly of Maryland Department of Legislative Services*, 11 January 2023, <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabPDF/MCSS23.pdf>. Accessed 21 January 2024.

² *Id.* at 10.

³ *Id.* at 4.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.* at 5.

the remaining \$309,000 in charges were not supported by the reports and it could not explain the difference.”⁶

- “Grant payments were not subject to supervisory review and approval... Specifically, our test of nine payments over \$100,000 disclosed that seven payments totaling \$967,000 lacked documentation of an independent supervisory approval.”⁷

Moreover, during fiscal years 2020 through 2022, SRO grant payments totaled \$8.0 million.⁸ Some school systems received multiple grants to local law enforcement agencies while *other school systems did not even apply for SRO grants*.⁹ There is no reason to double the amount of funds being appropriated for SROs and law enforcement coverage when the current funding is not being fully used and there are concerns about the management of the current funds. The MCSS needs to put in place additional oversight, protocols, and accountability measures before it is given additional funding and responsibilities.

HB 157 is also misguided because adding more police to our schools will not make our schools safer but will negatively impact the climate in our schools and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Studies have found that the presence of SROs has limited effects on school safety but results in negative student outcomes such as increased suspension, expulsion, police referrals and arrests.¹⁰ Black students and students with disabilities are disproportionately harmed by the presence of police in schools. In Maryland, for the 2021-22 school year, Black students received 61% of school arrests despite comprising only 33.2% of the student population. Special education students received 28% of school arrests despite comprising 12% of the student population.¹¹

The state should not increase funding for SROs and law enforcement coverage--an ineffective and unproven safety strategy. Rather, we should focus on ensuring that the *Blueprint* plan, specifically pillar 4, is fully implemented.¹² Evidence-based strategies and resources such as mental and behavioral health services, community-based wraparound services, community schools and restorative approaches are *proven* strategies that serve to foster strong relationships between students and school staff to create safe school environments.¹³

For these reasons, CRSD urges an unfavorable report on HB 157.

For more information contact:

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.* at 1 & 4.

⁹ *Id.* at 4.

¹⁰ DePaoli, J. & McCombs, J. (2023). *Safe schools, thriving students: What we know about creating safe and supportive schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/701.445>

¹¹ Maryland State Department of Education (2023), *Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data: School Year 2021-22*, <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestDataSY20212022.pdf>

¹² <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/mreass/>

¹³ DePaoli, J. & McCombs, J. (2023). *Safe schools, thriving students: What we know about creating safe and supportive schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/701.445>

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