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### **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 Baltimore Teachers Union opposes House Bill 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. .

The Baltimore Teachers Union represents 8,280 teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, clinicians, librarians, secretaries, community school site specialists, bus transportation aides, and many more school-based and central office support staff. We are 4 out of 5 workers in Baltimore City Public Schools, serving 75,811 students and their families. Our national union, the American Federation of Teachers, has over 1.7 million members in the United States and its territories.

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. The Baltimore Teachers Union opposes an increase to the fund in light of a recent state audit of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS). The audit by MCSS finds that these funds aren't being managed appropriately or fully used.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, during fiscal years 2020 through 2022, SRO grant payments totaled \$8.0 million.<sup>2</sup> Some school systems received multiple grants to local law enforcement agencies while *other school systems did not even apply for SRO grants*.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> "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.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 1 & 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 4.

Baltimore Teachers Union believes that the MCSS needs to put in place additional oversight, protocols, and accountability measures before it is given additional funding and responsibilities.

Continuing to add more funding for school police in Baltimore City will not make our schools safer. Our students and our communities are asking for fully staffed schools, doors with working locks, mental health supports, more guidance counselors and after school activities to keep students safe. The Baltimore Teachers Union believes that HB 157 is also misguided in its efforts to ensure safer schools.

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

**For these reasons, the Baltimore Teachers Union urges you to oppose HB 157.**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://blueprint.marylandpublicschools.org/mreass/>

<sup>5</sup> 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>