



THE CHOICE PROGRAM AT UMBC

THE SHRIVER CENTER

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 Choice Program at UMBC 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.

The Choice Program has served Maryland youth who are systems-involved for more than 35 years. Presently, Choice works with young people and their families in Baltimore City as well as Baltimore, Howard, Prince George's, and Montgomery Counties. Young people often remind us that their past trauma—and worst mistakes—should not define them. Choice serves as an alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline. Our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and Latine young people who are entangled in the youth legal system. Our model seeks to dismantle racist structures and, instead, employs strengths-based approaches focused on positive relationships and youth agency. We hold high expectations for youth and parents as well as high levels of support. These guiding principles are essential in addressing racial inequities at an individual and systemic level.

Maryland's legal system disproportionately ensnares Black and Latine young people, limiting their life chances in education, vocation, civic engagement, and health and wellbeing. Our public schools must offer young people developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive interventions, not exacerbate stubborn inequities by relying on policing. We are concerned that by defining and increasing funding for more police and SROs, students of color and those with disabilities will be at greater risk.¹

¹ Advancement Project and Alliance for Educational Justice, *We Came to Learn, A Call for Action for Police-Free Schools*, 2023.

As the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability (MCJPA) has noted:

- There is no reliable evidence that school police or school resources officers (SROs) keep students and educators safe.
- Research has not demonstrated that the presence of police/SRO presence reduces school shootings or other violence.
- One study found that an increase in school police/SRO presence did not decrease any category of school-based offenses.
- Students' perception that school police treat them unfairly can have a counterproductive effect on student behavior.
- School police/SROs have made Black students feel less safe because of over-policing and racialized police violence.²

This session offers the chance to remake our youth legal system, to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, and to reduce racial and ethnic disparities especially for children and young adults. We urge greater investment in positive youth development.

For these reasons, The Choice Program urges an unfavorable report on HB 157.

² MCPJA, Replace Police with Student Supports, 2021