

CLINICAL LAW PROGRAM

**Testimony in *Opposition* of Senate Bill 819
Public Schools - School Resource Officers - Firearms Required**

To: Senator Brian J. Feldman, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

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I am a student attorney in the Youth, Education and Justice Clinic (“the Clinic”) at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. The Clinic represents children who have been excluded from school through suspension, expulsion, and other means, as well as individuals who are serving life sentences for crimes they committed when they were children (“juvenile lifers”) or young adults. I write in opposition to Senate Bill 819, which seeks to require Baltimore City school police officers to carry a firearm while present on the school premises.

The Baltimore Schools Police is a police force of over 140 officers working in schools across the Baltimore City School District. Armed school police officers create fear that makes it difficult for students to learn. Students feel that they are seen and treated as suspects.¹ As the National Association of School Psychologists explained ten years ago when warning against arming school personnel, “[s]tudents’ perception of safety is not a trivial consideration given that simply feeling unsafe impedes learning and the ability to develop a nurturing, supportive, and welcoming school environment.”²

These feelings of fear and suspicion are more acutely felt by Black and Brown students. Notably, Black and Latine students comprise nearly 90 % of the student population in Baltimore City Public Schools.³ Black and Brown children – and particularly Black

¹ Harold Jordan, *Don’t Arm School Police*, PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE, Mar. 30, 2017, <https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2017/03/30/Don-t-arm-school-police/stories/201703300082?pgpageversion=pgevoke>

² National Association of School Psychologists, *NASP Cautions Against Increasing Armed Security to Improve School Safety* (updated Jan. 16, 2013), <https://www.nasponline.org/x27125.xml>

³ Black and Brown children comprise 71% and 18.6%, respectively, of students currently enrolled in Baltimore City Schools. BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, CITY SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE, <https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/page/district-overview> (last visited Feb. 22, 2024).

children in Baltimore – have historically had negative relationships with law enforcement rooted in distrust, fear, and abuse. Black children are also more likely to have negative relationships with school police officers. Indeed, Black students in Maryland are disproportionately arrested in schools. In the 2021-2022 school year, Maryland’s Black students comprised approximately 33.2% of the overall student population⁴ but accounted for 61% of school-based arrests.⁵ In Baltimore specifically, all of the 35 students subjected to school-based arrests in the 2021-2022 school year were Black.⁶ These arrest demographics forecast that arming Baltimore’s school police officers with guns while on school premises will exacerbate fear, distrust, and trauma stemming from negative interactions many Black children have had with law enforcement.

In addition, studies show that arming school police officers with guns does not make schools safer. In fact, the opposite is true as arming school police officers makes schools less safe by increasing physical dangers to youth.⁷ It has been found that there is significantly higher serious school violence in schools where the officers carried firearms.⁸

Schools are meant to be safe places for students where they can learn, grow, make mistakes, and be themselves. Students should be safe and feel safe in their schools. Requiring Baltimore school police officers to carry guns while on school premise turns schools from safe places of learning to police zones that bring the imminent dangers of lethal police violence. Baltimore’s students need holistic supports to address their needs, adverse childhood experiences, and trauma, not police officers who patrol school hallways with guns. Accordingly, the Clinic opposes SB 819.

This written testimony is submitted on behalf of the Youth, Education, and Justice Clinic at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law and not on behalf of the School of Law or the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

⁴ MARYLAND STATE DEP’T. OF EDUC., MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND GENDER AND NUMBER OF SCHOOLS 1 tbl. 1 (Sept. 30, 2021), https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20212022Student/2022_Enrollment_ByRace_Ethnicity_Gender_Publication_Accessible.pdf

⁵ MARYLAND STATE DEP’T. OF EDUC., MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARREST DATA SCHOOL YEAR 2021-2022, 2 (Mar. 2023), <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestDataSY20212022.pdf>

⁶ *Id.* at 16-17.

⁷ Wesley G. Jennings Et al., *Evaluating the Relationship Between Law Enforcement and School Security Measures and Violent Crime in Schools*, J. OF POLICE CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS 109, 118 & 120 (2011).

⁸ *Id.* at 120.