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TESTIMONY ON SB 0081
Criminal Law – School Resource Officers – Prohibition on Sexual Activity with Students
Committee: Judicial Proceedings
January 27, 2026 at 1pm

The University of Maryland, Baltimore Center for Violence Prevention (CVP) supports SB 0081, which closes a loophole in Maryland’s sexual offense statute by prohibiting sexual conduct between a school resource officer and any student at the school to which the officer is assigned, recognizing the inherent power imbalance and duty of care owed to students. Over the past decade, hundreds of police officers nationally have been charged with child sex crimes, including more than 200 school-based police officers. These officers, including school resource officers, exploit their position of trust to perpetrate abuse, with many incidents occurring on school grounds. This proposed legislation provides the statutory clarity needed to prosecute or discipline school resource officers for their abuses of power in these cases. The amendment simply adds school resource officers to the list of positions covered under §3-314, ensuring that they are legally prohibited from engaging in sexual acts. This closes an existing gap, strengthens protections for minors, and reinforces the expectation that all adults in authority within schools are bound by the same ethical and legal standards.

I am the inaugural Executive Director of the CVP. We are a community informed initiative of the University of Maryland, Baltimore in collaboration with the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center at the University of Maryland Medical Center – the first of its kind. Our aim is to build resilient communities for all through the prevention and intervention of all forms of violence and trauma. We do this in an interdisciplinary, collaborative fashion where we conduct community-based participatory research, provide creative and impactful education, and inform and advocate for policies that strengthen our communities to prevent violence and trauma.

As a woman of color, I have focused on the application of behavioral and social science perspectives to research on contemporary health problems, especially those that disproportionately affect people of color. I am a prevention research scientist whose scholarship has focused primarily on individuals and the environments that support or impede chronic disease prevention or management, injury, and violence -- including sexual violence. In my research, I have found that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by school-based policing and by power imbalances in educational environments. Strengthening this law will help promote accountability, equity, and safety for all students, especially those in overpoliced or under-resourced schools. This amendment addresses a known disparity, thereby building greater trust between students, families, and school systems in communities of color.

For these reasons, the UMB Center for Violence Prevention supports SB 0081.