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HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
HOUSE BILL 327: PUBLIC EDUCATION – SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS – PROHIBITED CONDUCT

FEBRUARY 5, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY

Youth As Resources, (YAR) is a youth-led grantmaking, community organizing and leadership development non-profit organization. We provide the funding, training and support to Baltimore youth to develop projects that address our critical issues and positively impact the community. We are governed by a Board of Directors currently comprised of 20 youth and young adults (ages 14-24) and one older adult. The Board adopts an issue organizing and advocacy agenda each year. School police accountability is a priority for direct organizing and leadership by our Board.

Our school police accountably organizing evolved from our work around school climate and disability awareness in about 2014.

We were alarmed by student arrest statistics and the impact. This led us to organizing to develop the school police report card. In 2015, we spent the summer talking with our peers to develop the content for the school police report card.

To date, we have held focus groups with over 1,000 youth so far. We also convene a bi-monthly school police roundtable with youth, adult allies and policy advocates. As a result of our work, new policies recommended by our peers were included in the school police policies and general orders. These included clearer guidelines around force and school discipline, training recommendations including requiring youth-led training for school police officers and the institutionalization of the school police rating tool (report card) designed to gauge the interactions and relationships between school police and students.

Last year, we worked with other grassroots organizations and activists to defeat any efforts to allow school police officers in Baltimore City to carry a gun during regular instructional hours.

Youth As Resources supports HB 327 to prohibit SROs from getting involved in routine school discipline matters because:

Although we have gotten specific feedback on positive experiences with school police officers in Baltimore City and students report relationships with school police officers are more positive than their relationships with police in the community; too many students still report that they believe school police use force not appropriate to the situation and/or their involvement does more to disrupt conflict than to diffuse.

Furthermore, we are not adults on the street; student behavior should not be criminalized. School police involvement has the potential to create an opportunity for students to get involved in the justice system which almost always results in even more negative outcomes.

School Police are a part of the eco system of our schools. HB 327 is important in that it will more thoroughly define school police officers' roles. This is important because:

- If their roles are not defined; they may get out of hand and not relate appropriately to students.
- We must make sure that they do not overstep their boundaries and violate our rights while at the same time there should be clear practices to keep us safe if a situation arises like a school intruder.
- It is not safe at all for police to get involved in school discipline issues; we don't really trust them all the way to not use force and hurt us.
- Most of the time school police officer's involvement does not result in a resolution; police use force and could use handcuffs. This causes more drama in the school. They also are not trained on youth culture and may not be able to relate to what is really going on.
- Students in Baltimore City have a deep-seeded mistrust of police and without clearly defined roles, a student may escalate a situation where the officer was unneeded in the first place.

Without student and community voice and the monitoring of clear policies and practices; school police will once again lend themselves more to the school-to-prison pipeline than keeping us safe.

Please excuse our absence. We really wanted to be here but are busy training school police on youth/adult partnerships and relationship building.