

Dear Chair Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am a resident of **District 21** and have lived in Maryland most of my 70 years. I am a Licensed Marital and Family Therapist as well as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County.

**I am testifying in support of bill HB1089**, the Police-Free Schools Act, which prohibit armed school resource officers with arrest powers to be housed in schools and reinvests the \$10 million spent on them by the state into social workers, psychologists, behavioral specialists, and other restorative practices to respond to student behavioral issues starting in 2023.

School police do not make our children and teachers safer. Research has not shown that police presence reduces school shootings or other violence. Rather, they criminalize Black and Brown children and increase the likelihood that they will leave school before graduating. Yet every Maryland school district utilizes school police despite evidence that police presence criminalizes students for minor behaviors without addressing serious safety threats, needlessly perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline. When I was growing up kids sometimes had fights at school. The police weren't involved. They weren't needed. We worked things out ourselves or with the intervention by school staff.

Fortunately, Maryland has an opportunity this session to make our educational facilities safer by removing police from our schools. Currently, Maryland spends \$10 million on school police, whose discriminatory practices cause harm and reduce community safety. By disinvesting in school police Maryland can reinvest the \$10 million already available into social workers, resources for special education, restorative approaches to resolving conflict, psychologists, and counselors. Educators, researchers, and law enforcement have found that strategies supporting students' positive behavior and strengthening relationships among students, staff, and parents are highly effective at keeping schools safe. Proven and promising strategies include: restorative approaches, trauma-informed approaches, provision of wraparound services (including through community schools), special education planning and implementation, hiring of mental health specialists, counselors, and community resource coordinators. By redirecting the \$10 million per year it currently invests in school police, Maryland could support districts to successfully implement these alternatives.

These supports and resources will help our children learn and flourish, instead of punishing them and funneling them into a system of cages that will inhibit their development and make them less likely to become successful adults.

As a mental health professional and a racial justice advocate, I strongly advocate that removing school resource officers from Maryland schools, and I encourage you **to support HB1089**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Linda K. Girdner, Ph.D.  
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