

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs. I am a resident of MD District 12. I am testifying **in support of House Bill 1089**.



House Bill 1089 reinvests state dollars spent on armed school resource officers with arrest powers and reinvests them into social workers, psychologists, behavioral specialists, and other restorative practices to respond to student behavioral issues starting in 2023. It also precludes local jurisdictions from assigning cops to patrol schools

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 and enter the criminal legal system. 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.

Currently, Maryland spends \$10 million on school police, whose discriminatory practices cause harm and reduce community safety. The use of school police is a racist policy that promotes white supremacy. Black children are disproportionately subjected to arrests — they represent only about one-third of the student population, but 56% of all arrests. Data demonstrates that Black students misbehave at the same rate as their white peers. In Maryland, approximately 70% of school arrests are for fistfights without weapons and offenses like disruption/ disrespect, alcohol/tobacco, and trespassing. Research shows that Black students are repeatedly arrested for conduct that is routinely excused or only lightly punished when white students do it. Snowballing this effect, students' perception of unfair treatment by police has had a counterproductive effect on their behavior, and makes them feel less safe overall.

School police also disproportionately arrest students with disabilities. In Maryland, students with Individual Education Programs (IEP) receive 23% of school-based arrests while comprising only 12% of the student population. In this way, the policy criminalizes learning differences as well as emotional and behavioral challenges, instead of helping children succeed despite certain challenges.

Fortunately, Maryland has an opportunity this session to make our educational facilities safer by removing police from our schools. 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.

These supports will help our children learn and flourish, instead of funneling them into a system of cages that will inhibit their development and make them less likely to become successful adults. It is for all of these reasons that I advocate removing school resource officers from Maryland schools, and I encourage you to **support House Bill 1089**.

I appreciate your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katherine Wilkins

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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore