

March 3, 2021

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1089**

Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act)

**TO:** Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways & Means Committee

**FROM:** Vinny Prell

My name is Vanessa Prell and I live in Silver Spring in District 20. I am providing this testimony in support of HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act).

I have been a teacher in Maryland and DC for the last six years. I often tell my students that you can't learn or grow without making mistakes. As a Jewish person, mistakes are especially important to me. One of our most sacred holidays, Yom Kippur, is all about reflecting on the mistakes we have made, apologizing, and growing from them.

Our schools should be places where students can make mistakes. Sometimes students will spell a word wrong. Sometimes they will make a horrible hypothesis for an experiment. These mistakes are expected. We do not bar students from college for making a mistake on a math test. We do not tell students who fail a spelling test that they will never be writers. They make mistakes and we help them grow.

Sometimes a student makes a mistake by hitting a friend, or breaking the rules. These mistakes should also be expected. Children need to learn to manage their bodies and emotions as much as they need to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. When we put school resource officers (SROs) in schools, students can't be safe to make these kinds of mistakes, because they receive consequences far beyond what is appropriate for their age.

The SRO Program has real consequences for students. According to the Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement prepared by the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, the maintenance of the SRO Program "will not advance racial equity and social justice... because it does not prioritize diminishing disparities in student arrests or suspensions by race, income, or disability status."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement on Bill 46-20,  
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OL/OLResources/Files/resjis/2020/RESJ-Bill46-20.pdf>

I join student advocates in calling on you to prohibit schools from deploying School Resource Officers, and to instead provide the funding necessary to replace each SRO with a new on-campus staff person who can help meet the social-emotional needs of students. It is our responsibility to provide students with meaningful supports that help and do not harm. Therefore, I respectfully urge this committee for a favorable report on HB1089.

Respectfully,

Vinny Prell  
Silver Spring, MD