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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: Nicole Kaplan

My name is Nicole Kaplan, and I live in Silver Spring in District 19. I am submitting testimony in support of HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act).

Police in schools are causing more harm than good. I cannot remain silent when there are children feeling unsafe in their own schools. SROs can and should be replaced with counselors, social workers, and security guards whose training is focused in their various areas of expertise. No longer should police officers be referring students to court or otherwise interfering in typical discipline and adolescent issues. It's inappropriate and disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx students and students with disabilities. Schools are a place for students to learn -- but maybe more importantly, to make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes. Positioning police officers in schools to criminalize the mistakes all students make ruins lives.

Montgomery County Public Schools, just one of the school systems in Maryland that continues to perpetuate the school to prison pipeline, is one of the top school systems in the country. This is a system I proudly enrolled my daughter in this year as a kindergartner. My hope is that she grows up in a community where all kids feel safe, not just those that look like her.

We are at a precipice right now as a community, as a society, as a country. Because of advances in social media and video technology, we know with certainty the abuses that people of color are facing at the hands of police. We have an opportunity to make a big change. But it's not a hard change. We can tell the police department to re-deploy its officers deployed as SROs to other policing work, where they can maintain their relationships with schools -- but not be deployed in schools -- and

instead dedicate resources to staff whose passion and training is in the field of mental health.

Mental health professionals who will help students grow, help them to learn from their mistakes, and nurture them to become strong and successful citizens of our community, should be in our schools, not police officers. I urge this committee to support HB1089 to remove armed law enforcement officers from school and support all Maryland students.

Thank you,

Nicole Kaplan