



## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

### **HB 496 Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act)**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Lois Hybl and Richard Willson – Co-Presidents**

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports a comprehensive range of child-centered services to ensure all children a chance to grow toward stable, productive adulthood. These include early intervention to prevent later crisis, result-oriented, long-term evaluations of program and services based on measured outcomes.

Studies have shown that police presence in schools does not reduce school shootings or school-based violence. National studies show that students in schools with a police officer are five times more likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct and twice as likely to be referred to law enforcement for infractions (such as fist-fights) than students in schools without a police presence. According to *Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data: School Year 2018-19 (2020)*, Black students receive 56% of school-based arrests statewide despite representing only about a third of the student population, even though data demonstrates that Black students misbehave at the same rate as their peers. These interactions with law enforcement and the Juvenile Justice system can have lasting impact on a student and their families.

HB 496 proposes adding the following members to the School Safety Subcabinet Advisory Board: a social worker, a school counselor, a restorative approaches practitioner, a behavioral specialist, a community school coordinator, a representative from a school with strong implementation of trauma informed practices and a representative from a community mediation group and a public-school student has experienced school-based arrest. This Advisory Board will provide guidance and assistance to the Center for School Safety which would, in addition to collecting data about School Resource Officers be required to report about School Security Employees.

HB 496 proposes reallocating the \$10 million that is currently spent to help school systems hire Police Officers to be granted to schools for the purpose of hiring or contracting with school psychologists, social workers, school counselors and other behavioral specialists. The bill has provisions for ensuring that the funds are used as intended and has a reporting requirement for evaluating the deployment of these new supports for students and teachers.

The LWVMD strongly urges a favorable report on HB 496.