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Anita Lampel
Bethesda, MD 20817



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: Anita Lampel, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Anita Lampel. I live in Bethesda, in District 16. This testimony is in support of HB1089, the Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police–Free Schools Act). I submit this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes more than 5,500 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

Jewish text teaches us that in all we do, we must work towards justice: “Tzedek, tzedek tirdof - Justice, justice shall you pursue.” As we work towards more equitable schools in Maryland, we must actively strive for justice. HB1089 brings us a step closer towards that pursuit.

I am a psychologist with a Ph.D. from Stanford University. In California, I served on state and county commissions often dealing with youth in the juvenile justice system, on advisory panels to my school board, and I was a court expert witness.

When I moved to Montgomery County, home to one of the finest school systems in the country, I was told it was a progressive bastion. I was happy—until I learned it was not so progressive--until I learned that Maryland has the highest percent of young Black men, ages 18 to 25, in prison of any other state--until I learned that Maryland has one of the worst records for juvenile justice in the country. School Resource Officers (SROs) contribute to these gross inequities.

- Your very own Maryland State Legislature’s Blue-Ribbon Panel on The School to Prison Pipeline noted, in its December 2018 report, that: “School Resource Officers told us that they viewed increased arrests in schools as a positive result of their work.”¹

¹ “Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices,” <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/media/SOL/pdfs/Programs/ADR/STPP%20%20RP%20Commission%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

- Montgomery County’s Office of Legislative Oversight created two Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statements on SROs that stated unequivocally: “A review of the research suggests that school-police partnerships, even those aligned with best practices, lead to higher arrest rates and may not offer the best investment for improving students’ learning environments.”²
- Major studies show negative outcomes for a range of student success measures when SROs are on campus, especially impacting Black students, Latinx students, Native students, and students who have Individual Education Plans. One of the outcomes-- graduation rates and college attendance drop.³
- Alternative approaches like those lifted up in this bill -- counseling, trauma informed interventions, crisis teams, restorative justice -- have a long lasting positive impact on all students, on the entire school community, not just those in trouble. Toronto, Canada has rid itself of SROs to enhance equity, they added support services, and students are thriving.

You are responsible for the long-term best interests of all students. They are residents of Maryland, and your constituents. HB1089 would address the demands of students, parents, educators, and administrators looking to replace armed law enforcement in school with well-funded, substantial alternatives to support the needs of our state’s students.

JUFJ respectfully urges a favorable report on HB1089.

² “Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement Bill 46-20,” <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2020/RESJ-Bill46-20.pdf>.

³ “Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for School Police on Student Discipline and Long-term Education Outcomes” Emily Weisburst, <https://strategiesforyouth.org/sitefiles/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PatrollingPublicSchools.pdf> and also see for additional references “Classroom Cops: Do Police Officers in Schools Help or Hinder Teachers?” Economist July 18, 2020 <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2020/07/18/do-police-officers-in-schools-help-or-hinder-teachers>