

**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee  
March 3, 2021**

**HB 1089 – Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and  
Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act)**

**FAVORABLE**

TO: Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, Committee Members

My name is Paul Holmes and I am a 28-year resident of Montgomery County. I am affiliated with the Silver Spring Justice Coalition, Jews United for Justice, and the Montgomery County Chapter of the ACLU. I submit this testimony as a concerned individual Maryland citizen and the father of two children who received excellent educations in our public schools.

I come today to urge your support of HB 1089 to remove armed police from Maryland public schools and to reinvest the funds saved into proven school support services such as clinical social workers.

The Committee has been presented with a broad array of studies, evidence, data and first-hand testimony, which in its totality supports police-free schools, absolutely, overwhelmingly and compellingly.

Personally, I have found the testimonies of students and recent graduates to be particularly captivating and convincing. They have been Black, Latino, White, LGBTQ, privileged, under-resourced and/or disabled. Some of the witnesses had themselves been victims of SRO misconduct while others stood as outraged allies of those victimized.

Those testimonies are reinforced and supported by a host of national, state and local studies which point to the damage caused by SRO programs and at the same time to a lack of evidence that police presence prevents school shootings or other violence. One would think all this would be so compelling that no member of this Committee would recommend retaining the SRO program. But no!

In the face of such overwhelming and pervasive evidence, and the only explanation I can think of is that some Committee Members are afraid. For decades, politicians have been terrified that they might appear soft on crime; that they might be blamed if a vote for reform was followed by a tragic incident. In this case, however, that fear is not real. It is invented. It is a myth, a fantasy. It is a fiction that SRO programs make schools or students safer. The only demonstrated reality is quite the opposite. SRO programs are themselves the greater tragedies by continuing to hurt, and focusing that hurt disproportionately on Black, Latino and special-needs students.

I urge House Ways and Means Committee members to find the integrity and courage to vote to remove SROs from Maryland public schools and to reinvest the savings from the SRO program into student support services. A vote in favor of HB 1089 is a vote for student welfare. A vote against HB 1089 is a vote to perpetuate the harm.

Thank you,  
Paul Holmes (D-19, Silver Spring)