



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

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

POSITION: Support

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On June 25, 2020 at the National Convention of the League of Women Voters of the United States, a resolution was adopted that contained the following words: “We call for prompt actions by all League members to advocate within every level of government to eradicate systemic racism, and the harm that it causes.” The League also supports a public education system that includes 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 and result-oriented, long-term evaluations of program and services.

Studies have shown that police presence in schools does not reduce school shootings or school-based violence. In fact a new [study](#) shows that more people die in school shootings where an armed officer is present. Other [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.

HB 1089 proposes eliminating armed police officers from schools and reallocating the \$10 million that is currently spent to help school systems hire School Resource 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 training that was formerly provided to School Resource Officers would be provided to School Security Employees who are unarmed and don’t have the power to arrest.

HB 1089 changes the composition of the School Safety Subcabinet Advisory Board to include more experts on mental and behavioral health. This Advisory Board will provide guidance and assistance to the Center for School Safety which would collect and analyze data about School Security Employees.

The LWVMD strongly urges a favorable report on HB 1089.