

March 3, 2021

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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: Barbara Schaffer

My name is Barbara Schaffer. I live in Rockville, MD, District 17. This testimony is support of Police Free Schools Bill HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act).

As a former teacher and a concerned citizen, I support police-free schools. Vulnerable youth and teenagers deserve to be educated in a safe and nurturing environment. Fear of arrest and incarceration have no place in our schools. When incidents arise, school staff should have social workers and mental health personnel to assist them in mitigating problems. These types of resources can work on a proactive and long-term basis with students who need help in working appropriately within the school environment.

School Resource Officers (SROs) react to situations. Their solutions often end children's education and socialization opportunities and push them into the criminal justice system. We need to keep students in school and spend those dollars on resources to help students work through their challenges. Statistics show that the arrests and incarcerations affect students of color and those with disabilities disproportionately.¹ I cannot condone laws and measures that don't support racial equality and the well-being of our children.

I respectfully urge a favorable report for HB1089.

Sincerely,
Barbara Schaffer

¹ MSDE, Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data, School Year 2018-19