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District 39

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL #HB0496, Primary and Secondary Education - Mental Health Services - Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act)

February 1, 2021

TO: Chair Kaiser and the members of the House of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Emily Monahan

Members of the House of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Emily Monahan, I live in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and I am writing to support Counselors Not Cops Act, HB 0496.

The Counselors Not Cops Act would ensure the safety of Maryland students and educators by replacing police presence with student supports to help address safety threats in our schools rather than criminalize student behaviors. Every Maryland school utilizes school police presence despite no reliable evidence that this presence keeps our students and educators safe. Offenses such as fistfights without weapons, disruption/disrespect, alcohol/tobacco, and trespassing make up approximately 70% of school arrests in Maryland. National studies show 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 those offenses. Black students receive a disproportionate number (56%) of these school-based arrests state-wide despite misbehaving at the same rate as their peers. Instead of a sense that this presence promotes and fosters students' safety and well-being, these students grow up observing a pattern that school police treat them differently than their peers. All of this can have a counterproductive effect on student behavior. The school-to-prison pipeline continues, the core issues are never addressed, and the safety threats continue to exist.

There are many effective measures that can be implemented in keeping schools safe. Educators, researchers, and law enforcement have found that strategies such as using restorative approaches, trauma-informed approaches, special education planning and implementation, aids to support students' positive behavior and strengthen relationships among students, staff, and parents are effective for keeping schools safe. Employing mental health specialists, counselors, and community resource coordinators is crucial. If Maryland redirected the \$10 million per year it currently invests in school police, it could support districts to successfully implement these alternatives.

I urge you to support HB 0496 and help ensure that not only do Maryland students and educators have their safety needs met, but our children have the best chance possible at a better future.