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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 496**  
Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion  
**(The Counselors Not Cops Act)**

**TO:** Hon. Chairperson Kaiser and the members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** Natalie Spicyn MD, MHS, FAAP

I am a primary care physician at a community health center in the Park Heights neighborhood of Baltimore, where, as a board-certified pediatrician and adult internal medicine specialist, I care for children, adolescents, and adults across the life span. I am writing in STRONG SUPPORT of HB 0496, the “Counselors Not Cops Act.”

As a physician, I am trained to examine evidence. The presence of school resource officers does not decrease any category of school-based offense, while increasing the likelihood that students would be arrested for disorderly conduct by a factor of five. Furthermore, the disparities data around school arrests is telling: in Maryland, Black students receive 56% of the arrests while representing only about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the population – which is disproportionate, given that Black students misbehave at the same rate as their peers. Students with Individual Education Programs (IEP) receive 23% of school-based arrests despite comprising only 12% of the overall student population.

My patients & their families often face barriers to accessing resources for emotional health needs, which are often at the route of behavioral difficulties. We can help bridge this gap by bringing the necessary resources into the schools and school-based health-suites. Rather than fund SROs – whose presence contributes to students’ feelings of unfair treatment and over-policing in their educational settings – Maryland has the opportunity to make the sound decision of redirecting the \$10 million annually spent on SROs and invest it in our children’s mental health and well-being. The money would be better spent funding school counselors and wrap-around services that can bring trauma-informed, restorative approaches to behavioral challenges in the school setting.

In summary, HB 496 is an important and timely piece of legislation that can allow Maryland to support all its children in reaching their full potential – a goal we pediatricians work towards every day. I hope you will prioritize passage of HB 496 during this legislative session and respectfully urge a favorable report.