

March 3, 2021

Melissa Goemann  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

**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:** Melissa Goemann

My name is Melissa Goemann, and I live in Silver Spring in District 20. I am testifying in support of HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act).

I am the Senior Policy Counsel for the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN), a nonprofit organization focused on youth justice. Our work is premised on the fundamental understanding that our youth justice systems are inextricably bound with the systemic and structural racism that define our society. Unfortunately, our nations’ schools have become one of the key feeders of a disproportionate number of youth of color into the juvenile justice system in a phenomenon commonly known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” This problem is exacerbated by the growing number of police officers stationed in schools, in programs such as the School Resource Officer (SRO) program present throughout our state.

As the Montgomery County’s Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) stated in their Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement on our County’s police free schools bill, “A review of the research suggests that school-police partnerships, even those aligned with best practices, lead to higher arrest rates and may not offer the best investment for improving students’ learning environments.” Not only did the OLO find that schools with SROs have higher arrest rates than schools without SROs, but their research about the demographics of MCPS arrests found that Black students are over-represented in school-based arrests in the County, accounting for 47% of all arrests in MCPS schools even though they only account for 22% of MCPS enrollment.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, Final Report and Collaborative Action Plan (2018), <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/media/SOL/pdfs/Programs/ADR/STPP%20%20RP%20Commission%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Montgomery County is not alone in these disparate outcomes. The school-to-prison pipeline is present throughout the state, and SROs undeniably contribute to the continued arrest of Black, Latinx, and disabled students.

We can and must do better for our children. Having police officers stationed in schools is a relatively recent phenomenon, not a practice written in stone. I grew up without a police presence in my public schools, as I'm sure many of you did as well. My principal, school counselors, and teachers served as educators in all senses of the word - meaning teaching students how to learn in a way that included how to behave appropriately. We can successfully return to that model, which resulted in far less criminalization of childhood conduct, if we look for a more holistic way to support our students. Passing HB1089 would replace student criminalization with student support, ensuring that all schools have the funds to hire the mental health and restorative justice staff who are trained to help -- not harm -- students.

There is a Jewish teaching that whoever saves a life, saves the world. I urge you to act to protect many children's futures by passing HB1089.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Coretz Goemann

---