



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice

2220 LeFrak Hall
College Park, Maryland 20742-8235
301.405.4699 TEL 301.405.4733 FAX

**HB 1089 – Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health
Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers
(Police-Free Schools Act)
Hearing before the House Ways and Means Committee
March 3, 2021**

Position: SUPPORT

My name is Denise Gottfredson. I am Professor Emeritus in the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland, College Park. For 35 years, I have conducted and published research on how to promote safe schools and reduce school violence. Most relevant to the HB1089 legislation is that I directed two large-scale studies of the effects of placing SRO officers in schools.

Both of these studies regarding SROs concluded that placing SROs in schools *increases* rather than decreases school crime. The later study found that these negative effects disproportionately affect students of color. We recommended on the basis of this research that funds devoted to placing SROs in schools would more profitably be diverted to funding school-based mental health professionals who are equipped to implement evidence-based practices aimed at promoting school safety. These recommendations are highly consistent with the proposed “Police-Free Schools Act.”

The first of my studies of the effects of SROs on school crime used a large national sample of schools with data collected over three time points so that we could examine how school crime changed at SROs were added over time. That study¹ found that as schools increase their use of police, they record more crimes involving weapon and drugs and report a higher percentage of their non-serious violent crimes to law enforcement.

The more recent study² collected new data from the state of California to again examine the effects over time of an increase in SRO staffing. We compared schools that added SROs in 2013 and 2014 as a result of receiving a grant from the COPS Hiring Program to similar schools that did not add SROs at the same time. We obtained 48 months of school

¹ Na, C., & Gottfredson, D. C. (2013). Police officers in schools: Effects on school crime and the processing of offending behaviors. *Justice Quarterly*, 30(4), 619-650. 10.1080/07418825.2011.615754.

² Gottfredson, D.C., Crosse, S., Tang, Z., Bauer, E. L., Harmon, M.A., Hagen, C.A., and Greene, A.D. (2020). Effects of School Resource Officers on School Crime and Responses to School Crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19 (3), 905-940.

Crosse, S., Gottfredson, D.C., Bauer, E. L., Tang, Z., Harmon, M.A., Hagen, C.A., and Greene, A.D. (2020). Are Effects of School Resource Officers Moderated by Student Race and Ethnicity? Available from authors.

discipline data and examined immediate effects of the adding SROs (2-3 months after SROs were placed) as well as long-term effects up to 20 months after SROs were added. We found that when schools increased SRO staffing, drug- and weapons-related offenses increased immediately, and that this rise persisted for 20 months. The number of exclusionary disciplinary actions taken against students also increased immediately after the rise in SRO staffing, and this increase persisted for 11 months. We also found that the increases in offenses and exclusionary reactions were most evident for black and Hispanic as opposed to white students. The results suggest that increasing SROs in schools differentially increases recorded school crime and exclusion from school for students of color. These results are troubling because we know that exclusionary responses to discipline are known to reduce students' chances for academic success³ and increase the likelihood that youth will become involved with the criminal justice system⁴.

On the basis of the results from our research, we recommended that

- Educational decision-makers and people who make decisions about how police are used should consider re-assigning SROs to more appropriate policing roles; and that
- Funding for SROs should be diverted to other school-based professionals, such as nurses, counselors, and teachers, who are better equipped to handle school discipline problems and who will be less likely than SROs to contribute to the criminalization of school discipline, particularly for students of color.

Results from my teams' research are corroborated by numerous other rigorous studies conducted over the past ten years. Indeed, comprehensive reviews of the effects of placing police in schools have concluded that the presence of school police leads to *no change* or an *increase* in reports of school crime. In short, the most rigorous scientific evidence available does not support the efficacy of placing police in schools for increasing school safety.

In closing, I encourage the passage of HB1089 because it is highly consistent with research that suggests that reducing police presence in schools will reduce school crime and disparate treatment of students of color. Diverting funds to school professionals who are in a better position to utilize practices that have been shown to be effective for increasing school safety is highly consistent with the recommendations from our most rigorous school safety research.

Sincerely,

Denise C. Gottfredson, PhD.
gott@umd.edu

³ Noltmeyer, A. L., Ward, R. M., & Mcloughlin, C. (2015). Relationship between school suspension and student outcomes: A meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review, 44*(2), 224-240.

⁴ Monahan K. C., VanDerhei, S., Bechtold J., & Cauffman, E. (2014). From the school yard to the squad car: School discipline, truancy, and arrest. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 43*(7), 1110-1122.

Mowen, T., & Brent, J. (2016). School discipline as a turning point: The cumulative effect of suspension on arrest. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 53*(5), 628-653.