

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Letter of Information
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
House Bill 1089
Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of
School Resource Offices (Police Free Schools Act)

March 3, 2021

As in recent years, there is legislation introduced to ban and/or modify school police, whether those school police are the City School Police Force or the local law enforcement that patrols schools within counties. This year is no different.

House Bill 1089 Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Offices (Police Free Schools Act) has been introduced and would prohibit all law enforcement to be on school property and would remove the City School Police Force and prohibit any school system from establishing a school police force. The legislation would also require the Governor to include \$10M beginning in FY2023 to fund grants to local school systems to hire school psychologists, school social workers, counselors, expand restorative practices, etc... I understand the concern that the sponsors have about the prison to school pipeline and the need to ensure appropriate behavioral and mental health professionals are in schools for our students. We also understand the need to ensure that school police do not involve themselves in the discipline of students and not criminalizing childish behavior or behavior from mental health concerns.

The Baltimore City Public School System has had its own school police force for over 40 years. The City School Police Force has built community relations inside the school building with many of its students. The City School Police force is there to mostly keep bad things from the community spilling into the school building.

Over the course of several years, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners conducted extensive public comment and engagement about the school police. Most of the engagement centered around arming school police while in school buildings. As many know, school police in the City are not armed during school hours, if they are assigned to a school. And, our school police officers are specifically trained to work with our students and receive training on trauma informed care, de-escalation, conflict mediation, etc. The training they receive is both evidence based and approved by the Maryland Center for School Safety and the Maryland Police Correctional Training Commission.

With the engagement and public input, the City School Police Force rewrote many of its General Orders. We have also created an MOU for school police and principals with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. As a result, we have significantly reduced student arrests over 91% over the last several years. I would also include that our Chief of Police and his team have received national recognition from their work with students.

Now that the Blueprint for Maryland's Future will become law, there will be additional funding to do what the proposed legislation requires. The Blueprint funding will allow school systems to have

more community schools, provide extensive wraparound services, promote more trauma informed care and build upon restorative practices, among many more items to address mental, behavioral and socio economic issues of students.

And lastly, we must state that the General Assembly passed legislation a few years ago (Safe to Learn Act) on student safety and requires school districts to have a plan that identifies adequate police coverage of school buildings. The Safe to Learn Act legislation was borne out of horrific shootings across the country and in Maryland's own schools. In Baltimore City there was an incident where a school based staff person was shot by a family member of a student, inside the school building. In St. Mary's County a young student was shot by another student.

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