

Chris Apple  
7001 Cradlerock Farm Court  
Columbia, MD 21045  
District 13

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

Feb 3, 2021

TO: Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Chris Apple

I am Chris Apple, and I live in Columbia in District 13. This testimony is in support of Bill HB0496.

Many Maryland schools have a police presence in the form of a School Resource Officer, or SRO. Although this program costs \$10 million per year, there is no reliable evidence that police presence reduces school shootings or other violence.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, police presence in schools can have a counterproductive effect on student behavior.

My mother was a career educator. She taught me that one of the worst things you can tell a student is that they can't achieve. And while the SRO may not say those exact words, their very presence may send that message. Police presence in schools has been shown to have a negative effect, with one report saying "Aggressive security measures can produce alienation and mistrust among students which disrupt the learning environment and create an adversarial relationship between school officials and students."<sup>2</sup>

That same report says "Researchers across the country ... have found that relationships between students, parents, and staff are more important in making a school safe than increased security measures." Schools need professionals who can help students deal with psychological issues, like normal teenage anxiety. When we have these psychologists and support staff in place, the students will see us following through on our promise that we want them to thrive. We'll actually be investing in their future.

I respectfully urge you to support HB0496, which will ensure that Maryland is investing in proven programs for our schools and students.

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<sup>1</sup> Chongmin Na and Denise C. Gottfredson, Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors, *Justice Quarterly* (2011), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754>

<sup>2</sup> Dignity in Schools Campaign, *A Resource Guide on Counselors Not Cops* (2016), [http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource\\_Guide-onCNC-1.pdf](http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource_Guide-onCNC-1.pdf)