**Police-Free Schools Act**
**HB 1089**
**Ways and Means Committee**
**March 3, 2021**

**TESTIMONY OF PLAYERS COALITION**
**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Players Coalition, directly and in connection with its affiliate organization, PC Charitable Foundation, an Ohio nonprofit corporation recognized as a tax-exempt organization pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, works with professional athletes, coaches and owners across leagues to improve social justice and racial equality in our country. We work to make an impact at the federal, state, and local levels and have active members here in Maryland. Players Coalition supports HB 1089 because it gets police out of our children's schools and invests in student mental health services, wraparound supports, and restorative approaches, interventions which effectively support positive behavior and keep schools safe.

**Police Do Not Belong in Schools**. Generations of wisdom tells us that when all a person has is a hammer, he treats everything like a nail. Similarly, when a school's primary tool for responding to conflict and behavior challenges is a police officer, it ends up treating students like criminals – rather than children whose brains and social skills are still developing. Nationally, students in schools with a police officer are five times more likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct and twice as likely to be referred to law enforcement for run-of-the-mill fistfights than students in schools without one.[1]  In Maryland, where every district stations police in at least some of its schools, there were 3,141 school-based arrests during the 2018-19 year. Approximately 70% were for low-level, developmentally-anticipated behaviors, like fights without weapons, disruption, property destruction, and disruption.[2] Each of these arrests causes real harm, making it more likely a student will ultimately drop out of school – which itself increases the probability that he or she will be unable to secure gainful employment and become involved with the criminal system as adults.  Research has found, for example, that a student who faces arrest in childhood or adolescence is 22 percentage points less likely to graduate than a student with the same characteristics who is not arrested.[3]

Beyond increasing the likelihood of subjecting students to needless arrests, and funneling them into a pipeline to prison, the presence of police in schools makes many students feel unsafe. This is particularly true for Black students, who are routinely confronted with police brutality in their neighborhoods and in the media, and students whose immigration status may put them or their families at risk for detention

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[1] Dignity in Schools Campaign, A Resource Guide on Counselors Not Cops (2016), http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource_Guide-on-CNC-1.pdf

[2] Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data: School Year 2018-19 (2020), http://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2020/0623/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestData20182019.pdf

[3] David S. Kirk & Roger J. Sampson, Juvenile Arrest and Collateral Educational Damage in the Transition to Adulthood, 88 J. Sociol. Educ. 36 (2013),  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4192649/

and deportation. Police presence in schools distracts and traumatizes these students, making it harder for them to focus and learn.[4]

**Strategies to Support Students' Social-Emotional Development and Meet their Mental Health Needs Keep Schools Safe – but They Require Investment**. There are powerful, evidence-based tools for supporting children to regulate their emotions and resolve conflict appropriately – and by implementing these tools, we make schools safer for all students without perpetuating the school to prison pipeline. Trauma-informed practices address the impact of trauma through access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services, positive and non-exclusionary discipline, and shared knowledge among staff about how to work with children who bring heavy emotional burdens to school. When schools implement a trauma-informed approach, they see decreases in student behavior crises and disciplinary referrals, becoming "calmer" and "safer."[5]  Social-emotional curriculum teaches young people how to moderate their own feelings and behaviors, treating good character not as an in-born trait but as a skill to acquire and hone.  Students who participate in tested social-emotional learning programs experience less distress and engage in less violent conduct in the short-term and long-term.[6] Finally, restorative approaches develop relationships among students and staff to minimize conflict and repair harm when it does occur. Schools that comprehensively adopt restorative approaches see improvements in student behavior and rely less on suspension and similar responses.[7]  When we deploy these and other strategies, we make schools safer for everyone.

Yet, Maryland has not invested adequately in these student and school safety measures. Implementation of the above strategies depends on counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, mental health professionals, restorative approaches practitioners, and community school coordinators, but we fall short as a state on recommended staffing levels across these positions.[8] At the same time, we spend $10 million per year in state revenues and substantially more in local dollars to station sworn law enforcement in schools in every district.[9]

**Supporting Police-Free Schools is Not Anti-Police**.  Too often, the debate over whether to station police in schools is framed as a debate about being for or against police generally. This is a mistake: one can

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[4] Chris Curran et al, The Good Guy Image Police Present to Students Often Clashes with Students' Reality, The Conversation (June 5, 2020), https://theconversation.com/the-good-guy-image-police-present-to-students-often-clashes-with-students-reality-139821

[5] Wehmah Jones et al, Trauma & Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI): Trauma-Sensitive Schools Descriptive Study, American Institutes for Research (2018), https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TLPI-Final-Report_Full-Report-002-2-1.pdf

[6] Taylor, R. Oberle, E., Durlak, J. & Weissberg, R. , Promoting positive youth development through school-based social emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development. 88*(4), 1156-1171. (2017).

[7] National Education Policy Center, The Starts & Stumbles of Restorative Justice in Education: Where Do We Go From Here? (2020), https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Revised%20PB%20Gregory_0.pdf; OSI Baltimore, Restorative Practices in Baltimore City Schools: Research Updates and Implementation Guide. https://www.osibaltimore.org/wp-content/ uploads/2020/09/RP-Report-2020-FINAL.pdf.

[8] ACLU, Cops & No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Services is Harming Students, 12-14 (2019), https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_ document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf

[9] Md. Educ. 7-1508(g).

recognize that police have a role in the community generally but should not have a place in our schools. It comes down to the functions we, as a society, are asking school police to carry out. If the goal of school policing is to prevent school shootings and other serious violence, we must confront the data that clearly demonstrates that the model simply has not had that impact:

- A 2020 investigation of the impact of expansions of school policing in Florida, following the Parkland school shooting (where an SRO was unable to stop the shooter), shows that found "little consistent evidence that the presence of law enforcement decreased the number of behavioral incidents occurring, indicating that school-based law enforcement were not necessarily making schools safer"[10]
- A study of approximately 3,000 schools nationwide found "no evidence suggesting that SRO or other sworn law-enforcement contribute to school safety"[11]
- Another observed that "no empirical evidence supports th[e] claim" that school police stop shootings and in many of the highest profile school shootings nationwide the presence of armed school police failed to deter or stop shooters[12]
- A review of over 40 years of research found that the "evidence . . . fails to support a safety effect" associated with officer presence at schools[13]
-  A study published earlier this month concluded that the presence of armed officers in schools actually *increased* the number of fatalities associated with school shootings.[14]

If, instead, the goal is to provide students with a resource for counseling and mentorship, we must recognize that there are other professionals who are better positioned to do that job. School counselors and social workers receive years of training and certification in a range of topics relevant to child development, student mental health and social/emotional well-being, and behavior. School police receive only a one-week training on de-escalation, disability awareness, maintaining a positive school climate, constructive interactions with students, and implicit bias and diversity awareness.[15]  This limited training does not qualify officers to provide students with mental health or case management services. Moreover, a police officer's primary job is to enforce the law.  This includes arresting those students with whom the officer has a counseling mentoring relationship when those students engage in any activity that could be construed as a criminal violation – such as fighting. Schools should provide

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[10] Chris Curran, The Expanding Presence of Police in Florida Schools: Research Report at 2(2020), https://www.aclufl.org/sites/default/files/curran_-_the_expanding_presence_of_law_enforcement_in_florida_schools.pdf

[11] Chongmin Na & Denise Gottfredson, Police Officers in School: Effects on School Crime & the Processing of Offending Behaviors, Justice Quarterly (2011), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754.

[12] Denise Gottfredson et al, Effects of School Resource Officers on School Crime and Responses to School Crime, J. Criminology & Pub. Pol. (2020); *see also* Alex Yablon, Do Armed Guards Prevent School Shootings?, The Trace (April 6, 2019), https://www.thetrace.org/2019/04/guns-armed-guards-school-shootings/

[13] Alexis Stern & Anthony Petrosino, What Do We Know About the Effect of School-Based Law Enforcement on School Safety? (2018), https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JPRC-Police-Schools-Brief.pdf

[14] Riham Feshir, New Research Finds Armed Officers Increase the Likelihood of Fatalities at School Shootings, Minnesota Public Radio (Feb. 16, 2021), https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/02/16/research-finds-armed-officers-increases-mortality-at-school-shootings

[15] Md. Code Ann., Educ. 7-1508(b); COMAR 14.40.04.03.

students with counseling and mentorship, but they should do so through adults who are not compromised by law enforcement obligations.

**HB1089 makes schools safer for all students by getting police out of schools and investing in strategies that work. We urge a favorable report.**


Sincerely,

Torrey Smith (NFL player, retired)