

Jonathan Rochkind  
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Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

As a resident of District 43 and Baltimore City, I am submitting this testimony to urge you to **SUPPORT HB0496**, Primary and Secondary Education - Mental Health Services - Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act).

Problems with safety in our schools and communities in Maryland are real.

But it's long-past time we stopped looking to policing for an answer.

Filling our schools with policing is inappropriate educationally, inappropriate for child development, and does not make our schools safer.

For too many students, particularly students of color, school is the on-ramp to America's mass incarceration machine. In Maryland, Black students account for 56% of school-based arrests despite making up only a third of the school population and being no more likely than their peers to misbehave. Disabled students are also disproportionately likely to be among those arrested.

And police are not making schools safer. Evidence shows that being treated with distrust actually causes student behavior to worsen in response. And no evidence has shown that school police actually make schools or students safer.

There **are** things that can make our schools safer, and we need funds for these mental health services, not for policing.

Instead of criminalizing our kids, we have an amazing opportunity to redirect these funds to support them by equipping their schools with mental health workers, social workers, community school coordinators, and other programs and services. We have strategies that are proven to work in aiding our young people's development – let's invest in those, rather than in a strategy that has proven itself a failure.

Sincerely,

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