

March 3, 2021

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1089

Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act)

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

FROM: Rebecca Stanislawski

My name is Rebecca Stanislawski, and I am submitting this testimony in support of HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act). I am testifying as a Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) student from Bethesda Chevy Chase High School.

I am also a member of Bonimot Tzedek, a social justice leadership and activism program for Jewish teens. My Jewish identity has played a big role in sparking my activism when it comes to police in schools. The Jewish value of *chesed*, meaning the kindness and love between individuals, represents how issues of injustice affect us all. No matter what race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion we are, we have a duty to stand up for those who need allies. After police killed George Floyd -- and Finan Berhe in Montgomery County -- in May 2020, I realized now is the time for change, and the more hands on deck, the better.

In my sophomore year of high school, a Black classmate sat at the table across from me in chemistry class. Our school's resource officer frequently came into our classroom class and asked to escort this student out of class. This would happen at least once a month. Many classmates would audibly react with an "oooh" or a "he's in trouble." The School Resource Officer (SRO) would walk up to the teacher and ask for the student to come with them, and the fear in the student's eyes remained the same each time he was asked to leave. He would not come back for the rest of the class each time he was pulled out. My classmate was pulled out of class, regularly, shamed by students, and missed critical class time because of our SRO.

The rates in which students of color are disproportionately targeted by SROs is appalling. Keeping SROs in school would only cause more anxiety when my classmates are already targeted by police in schools. If the goal of SROs is to make students feel safer in school, we should be investing in ensuring students have access to trusted adults and important resources.

If the money that is allocated for the officers in schools were to be given to trained professionals who can safely offer help for students in need, the future of students' safety in school could drastically change for the better. I am in full support of HBI089, and I believe, if passed, Maryland students would feel much safer during the school days and be provided with critical resources. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Rebecca Stanislawski