



Advocacy, Organizing, Policy

HB 496

**Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services Expansion
(Counselors Not Cops Act)**

Ways and Means Committee

February 3, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

Racial Justice NOW! Is committed to dismantling structural and institutional anti-Black racism in all areas of people activity. Our primary focus is on the institution of education and lifting up the voices of disempowered Black parents and children. We are dedicated to stopping the school to prison pipeline and focus specifically on holding institutions accountable to equitable distribution of resources and services to the Black Community. **We support HB496, which reinvests Maryland’s \$10 million/year SRO fund in student mental health services, wraparound supports, and restorative approaches.**

School policing harms Black children. In Maryland, 56% of school-based arrests target Black students, even though they are only a third of the student population.¹ Adulthood, the phenomenon that Black children are perceived as much older and less innocent than their non-Black peers, contributes to this disproportionality.² In addition, Black students are more likely than their white peers to attend schools with police, and with more police than mental health professionals.³ All children misbehave because their brains are still developing and they are still learning to regulate their emotions and mediate conflict. However, practices like school policing criminalize Black children – rather than teaching them – when they make these childhood mistakes. And the impact on these children’s future is both immediate and far-reaching. Studies show that long-term regular exposure to police, such as in schools, leads to significant reductions in test scores

¹ Maryland State Dep’t of Education, Maryland Public Schools School-Based Arrest Data 2018-19

² REBECCA EPSTEIN ET AL., GEORGETOWN LAW CTR. OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY, GIRLHOOD INTERRUPTED: THE ERASURE OF BLACK GIRLS’ CHILDHOOD 4 (2017), <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>; *see also* T. ELON DANCY III, THE ADULTIFICATION OF BLACK BOYS, in TRAYVON MARTIN, RACE, AND AMERICAN JUSTICE 50-55 (Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner et al., eds., 2014).

³ Kristen Harper & Deborah Temkin, Compared to White Majority White Schools Majority Black Schools Are More Likely to Have Security Staff, Child Trends (2018)

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for Black boys.⁴ Moreover, a single arrest can reduce the chances that a student graduates on time by 22 percentage points.⁵

The summer of 2020 compelled many Americans to recognize that Black Lives Matter. To give that statement meaning, we must take action to ensure that Black children have the opportunity to be children, which includes making childhood mistakes without having their entire education and future derailed. Removing police from schools, and reinvesting in strategies like social-emotional learning and restorative approaches – which teach children positive behavior without criminalizing them – is a place to start.

For these reasons, **we support HB496 and urge a favorable vote.** For questions, please contact Zakiya Sankara-Jabar at z.sankiya-jabar@rjndmv.org.

⁴ Jeffrey Fagan and Joscha Legewie, *Aggressive Policing and the Educational Performance of Minority Youth*, 84 American Sociological Review 220 (2019)

⁵ David S. Kirk & Robert J. Sampson, *Juvenile Arrest and Collateral Educational Damage in the Transition to Adulthood*, J. Sociol. Educ. (2013), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4192649/>

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