



Youth As Resources, Inc. (YAR)
111 North Charles Street, suite 502
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 576-9551 x1
www.youthasresources.org

HB 1089
The Police-Free Schools Act
March 3, 2021
POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY

Youth As Resources, (YAR) is a youth-led grantmaking, community organizing and leadership development non-profit organization. We provide the funding, training, and support to Baltimore youth to develop strategies that address our critical issues and positively impact the community. We are governed by a Board of Directors currently comprised of 17 youth and young adults (ages 14-21), many of whom are current students. The Board adopts an issue organizing and advocacy agenda each year. School police accountability is a priority for direct organizing and youth leadership.

Our school police accountability organizing evolved from our work around school climate and disability awareness.

We were alarmed by student arrest statistics and the impact. This led us to organizing to develop the school police report card in 2015. Subsequently, we fought to get the raw data from the report card and to have it presented by students without a district spin.

To date, we have held focus groups with over 2,000 youth to build our base, get input and educate our peers on their rights. We also convene a school police roundtable with youth, adult allies and policy advocates. As a result of our work, new policies recommended by Baltimore City youth were included in the school police policies and general orders. These included clearer guidelines around force and school discipline, training recommendations including requiring youth-led training for school police officers and the institutionalization of the school police rating tool (report card) designed to gauge the interactions and relationships between school police and students.

In 2019, we joined with other grassroots organizations and activists to defeat any efforts to allow school police officers in Baltimore City to carry a gun during regular instructional hours.

Currently, we are working with the Civilian Review Board to implement a student friendly and accessible complaint form that students can use independently to report school police misconduct.

We are proud to have contributed to addressing some of the concerns with police in Baltimore City Public Schools over the past six years, but we also know that these changes are not enough.

Youth As Resources supports HB 1089 to remove school police from Baltimore City and Maryland schools:

Our Board of Directors came to this decision because:

- We are young people, and we talk to other youth people. The Coalition organizing to remove school police in Baltimore City Schools presented to us and requested our support. To make an informed decision we wanted to learn more about where our peers stood on the issue. We administered a student survey (we received 99 responses) and facilitated five focus groups with 75 of our peers (over ZOOM). We asked for feedback around removing school police in an unbiased way. In other words, we did not present any argument or data. And although we continue to be concerned that students including us do not always feel safe, we found significant support for removing police from schools. About 60% felt that police should be removed from the schools and another 20% were not sure. Even amongst the minority of students who felt that police should be in schools; most wanted major changes such as having school police not wear uniforms and not get involved in fights and conflict.
- Although over the years we have gotten specific feedback on positive experiences with school police officers in Baltimore City and students report relationships with school police officers are more positive than their relationships with police in the community; too many students still report that they believe school police use force not appropriate to the situation and/or their involvement does more to increase conflict than to diffuse.
- Furthermore, we are not adults on the street; student behavior should not be criminalized. School police involvement has the potential to create an opportunity for students to get involved in the justice system which almost always results in even more negative outcomes.
- Finally, in our recent discussions and survey with our peers, the following are repeated recommendations for increased resources for students:
 - Security staff to replace school police including hall monitors.
 - More mental health counselors.
 - Increased programs and staff to address school climate, trauma, stress and wellness.
 - Safe spaces in schools where students and/or staff could go to get help and/or decompress.
 - Peer-to-peer programming where we could support each other.

We want to make sure that if school police are removed in Baltimore City, youth are in the front of the decision-making around how those resources would be re-allocated.

Thank you for your consideration. If we can provide you with any additional information; please contact Julie Reeder, our Executive Director at jreeder@youthasresources.org.

