

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Sharity Bannerman and I live in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. I urge you to vote School Resource Officers (SROs) out of schools. Following the death of George Floyd and many others around our nation, we must end the contract with law enforcement in our schools. The police who are murdering Black and Brown people in the streets are the same police that are brutalizing Black and Brown students in our schools.

I am very passionate about this matter as a former teacher and current mentor of many youth. Additionally, I as a Justice Task Force Organizer with Progressive Maryland, I join many others who have called for the removal of SROs such as leaders and students from Montgomery County Public Schools, Howard County Public Schools, Public Justice Center, Schools Not Jails, ACLU, PG Change Makers, and Maryland Office of the Public Defender. Maryland's Department of Education data shows that in the 2017-2018 school year, Prince George's County had 350 school based arrests while Montgomery County had 226 and Baltimore City had 60. Out of those arrests made by school resource officers in Prince George's County, 31 percent were non-violent offenses and a third were referred for prosecution. In 2019, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund explained in a letter to PGCPSS that, "Although Black students account for 58 percent of student enrollment in PGCPSS, they make up 78 percent of those experiencing out-of-school removals. Similarly, students with Individualized Education Plans comprise only 11 percent of enrollment, but 24 percent of those removed." These disparities are similar to those found in other large Black- and Brown-majority school districts, where policing schools is the norm. We have to eliminate racial discipline disparities, where nationwide Black students are 4 times as likely to be suspended than White students and 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than White students in school, despite exhibiting similar behavior patterns. Research shows police in schools create a toxic school environment and fuels the school-to-prison pipeline for young people of color.

Maryland General Assembly should reallocate funds used for SRO programs to student support positions such as school-based social workers, psychologists, restorative justice practitioners, or other mental or behavioral health professionals, as the budget supports, to meet the needs of students. Black students are 3 times more likely than non-Black students to attend a school with security than mental health personnel. Before we return to "normal" school post-Covid 19, we must demand an end to the pandemic of police violence in schools.

Please commit to the removal of law enforcement officers out of Maryland's public schools and investing in other valuable resources for the sake of our children and generations to come.

Sincerely,
Sharity Bannerman