

March 3, 2021

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HBI089**

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:** Sidra Hoffman

My name is Sidra Hoffman and I am a junior at Albert Einstein High School. I live in District 20 and I am providing this testimony in favor of HBI089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act).

Removing police from schools is a racial justice issue, and racial justice is one of the central values I have been taught through my Jewish education. At my Jewish summer camp, Habonim Dror Camp Moshava, we learn that it isn't enough to just be neutral in the face of injustice: we have to be actively working against it.

Racial justice was solidified as a Jewish value for me when I attended a vigil for Tyrone West in 2017 with my fellow campers. At this vigil, Tawanda Jones, West's sister, told the story of how her brother was killed by police; people who were supposed to protect him. Hearing her story, I understood why Jones continued to hold vigils week after week, even years after her brother was killed: to raise awareness of racism and police brutality present all over the nation, including in Montgomery County.

My Jewish education opened my eyes to racism present in our modern day world, especially in my schools. I noticed that students of color would get punished much more severely than white students who acted out in the same ways. While a white student may receive a verbal warning, students of color often received detentions or even suspensions. I also recently learned that this kind of unequal punishment often escalates even further than detentions, leading Black

students to be arrested by SROs far more frequently than white students. Despite only being 22% of the student population in MCPS, Black students make up 45% of school related arrests.<sup>1</sup> Racism in our schools, which is further incited through the SRO program, fuels the school to prison pipeline and puts the future of my fellow students in danger.

Additionally, I have witnessed firsthand the complete lack of adequate mental health services available at our schools. I have many friends who were unable to find the support from counselors and other mental health professionals they needed at school. This forced them to find expensive alternatives elsewhere, miss months of school, or even completely change schools. When I discovered that \$3 million dollars goes towards the SRO program in Montgomery County alone, I could not help but think that this money could be used for mental health professionals instead. As an MCPS student, I know my fellow students will benefit tremendously if HBI089 passes and school resource officers are replaced with professionals trained in supporting students.

Ultimately, school should be a place of learning and growth -- not a place of policing, fear, and stress. Therefore, I urge all of the committee members to report favorably on HBI089, in order to make schools a safer community for all students. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Sidra Hoffman  
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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, Final Report and Collaborative Action Plan (2018), <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/media/SOL/pdfs/Programs/ADR/STPP%20%20RP%20Commission%20Final%20Report.pdf>