

March 3, 2021

Jo Shifrin
Bethesda, MD, 20815

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: Jo Shifrin

My name is Jo Shifrin, and I live in District 16. I am testifying in support of HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act). Thank you to Delegate Acevero for introducing this bill.

Proponents of the school resource officer (SRO) program have said that SROs can prevent school-based shootings. However, there is no data that shows police in schools decrease school-based shootings. But there is clear data, both nationally and in my home of Montgomery County, that shows that the presence of School Resource Officers increases the number of school-based arrests of Black and Brown students and those with disabilities.¹ And, despite the fact that there is no evidence that children of different races or ethnic backgrounds exhibit different behavior in schools, Black children are 3 times more likely than white children to be arrested in schools in Maryland, and more than twice as likely as white children to be arrested in schools in Montgomery County.²

All of this is very clearly and carefully laid out in Montgomery County’s Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact statement prepared by the Office of Legislative Oversight, including evidence of the impact of SROs both nationally and in Montgomery County. On the specific question of the impact of SRO arrests on race in Montgomery County, OLO reported that “while Black students accounted for 22% of MCPS enrollment, among student arrests in schools between 2015 and

¹ Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, *The School to Prison Pipeline in Montgomery County*, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2016%20Reports/School%20to%20Prison%20Pipeline%20with%20CAO%20Response%2020166.pdf>

² 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>

2019, Black students accounted for 47% of all arrests in MCPS schools” and that arrests by SROs accounted for 74% of all student arrests in that period.³

And Montgomery County isn’t an anomaly: Maryland has the highest rate of incarceration of young Black men ages 18-24.⁴ SROs undeniably contribute to the over-criminalization of Black students and the school to prison pipeline.

Although many SROs may be good people, and provide some students with mentoring, they are still police. And because they are trained to enforce the law, they can interpret immature behavior as criminal conduct. Many of these arrests are for things like petty theft, fights, disorderly conduct, or other disruptions, which if they occurred outside of school would become teachable moments between parents and children.

Children need support, encouragement, and education to become well-adjusted adults who can make better decisions because they understand the consequences of their actions. It has been shown that when there are trained support staff in schools — such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists — students have higher graduation rates, lower absenteeism, and fewer suspensions.⁵

As you make your decision on the future of armed law enforcement in schools, please prioritize data and trusted research over anecdotal support for the SRO program. I respectfully urge you to support HB1089. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Jo Shifrin

³ Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, RESJ Impact Statement on Bill 46-20, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2020/RESJ-Bill46-20.pdf>

⁴ Justice Policy Institute, *Rethinking Approaches to Over Incarceration of Black Young Adults in Maryland* http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/12702?utm_source=%2fMarylandYoungAdult&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=redirect

⁵ 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>