

Arielle Juberg
Baltimore, Maryland
District 8

Testimony in Support of Bill HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act)

To: Chair Kaiser and members of the House Ways and Means Committee

From: Arielle Juberg

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice in Baltimore. 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)

I appreciate the General Assembly's commitment to strengthening Maryland schools. Rigorous, high-quality public schools are important to my husband and me as we consider starting a family. The presence of armed police officers (referred to as school resource officers) in Maryland schools has concerned me both as a resident and a future parent.

Placing police officers in schools has led to troubling results. In my county (Baltimore County), nearly a third of 2018-2019 arrests (62 out of 230 arrests) were for disrespect or disruption.¹ These behavioral issues are better addressed through a school counselor or social worker. A third of 2018-2019 arrests occurred among students in special education.¹ I am disturbed that the majority of arrests occurred among African American students (62%), while they comprise 39% of Baltimore County students.^{1,2}

Police officers receive extensive training in stopping criminal behavior and apprehending suspects. There is a serious mismatch when these same officers are arresting children for disruption and restraining children with special needs. I am sure school resource officers are committed to their jobs and communities. Unfortunately, the presence of these officers more often hurts, rather than helps, children. Using state funds for counselors, social workers, and other support staff would better meet children's developmental needs and be a more effective use of government funds.

I remain very concerned about school violence and shootings. Unfortunately, the evidence indicates that school resource officers do not prevent school shootings.³ The evidence *does* show the disproportionate impact of officers on students with special needs and students of color.

The services outlined in HB1089 will help our children learn and flourish, instead of funneling them into a system that will inhibit their development and make them less likely to become successful adults. It is for all of these reasons that I advocate removing school resource officers from Maryland schools, and I encourage you to support HB1089.

1 Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data. School Year 2018-2019.

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2020/0623/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestData20182019.pdf>

2 Maryland Public School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender and Number of Students, September 30, 2017.

<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Student/2018EnrollbyRace.pdf>

3 The Justice Institute. The Presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) in America's Schools.