

Hello, my name is Sarah Fishkind and I am a Co-Director of Policy for HoCo For Justice. I am here in support of HB0496 and removing SROs from all Maryland public schools. School should be a place for students to receive an education. School should be a place for students to embrace their creativity and do what they love. School should not be a place where our students experience discomfort and a sense of unsafety because of SRO presence.

Rather than having SROs, our schools should have funding for more mental health professionals. All staff should receive training on trauma enforced and restorative justice teaching practices. Restorative practices have worked in Maryland, and in this case specifically, Howard County. The Homewood Center is one great example. After implementing these practices, data shows a 15% increase in attendance, a 74% decline in office referrals, and a 48% decline in out-of-school suspensions and dropouts. The data is there to show the positive impact that restorative practices have. We know the solutions and we should start caring about the students' needs, rather than building a school-to-prison pipeline for them.

When placing SROs in Howard County schools there was no data to back up how they could positively impact school safety. There is data to prove that SROs do not have a positive impact on our students, specifically our Black and Brown students. Many of my peers understand the concern of keeping our children safe if there were to be a school shooting. WE are the ones that have been through the school system practicing lockdown drills and learning what to do if there were to be a shooting. There is plenty of data that shows how we can prevent school shootings BEFORE they happen. SROs did not stop the shooter at Marjory Stoneman Douglas. SROs did not stop the shooter at Columbine. Data has shown that SROs in schools will NOT stop school shooters. SROs in schools will NOT stop school shootings.

We know removing officers from schools does not violate the Safe to Learn Act. We know students are being harmed. There are many schools starting to remove police. Milwaukee recently did and Toronto, Canada has as well. This is not rushed, and it is time for us to finally take action. Let's start to build a future for our children, not the school-to-prison pipeline. Support House Bill 496.