



Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
HB 496 Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act)
February 3, 2021

SUPPORT

Dear Chair Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, and members of the Committee,

Community Justice supports HB 496, a bill that would reallocate funding previously used to fund Student Resource Officers and shift it into providing what students truly need -- counselors, mental health supports, trauma practices, and restorative practices.

We are a group of organizations and concerned community members who are dedicated to ensuring police accountability in Prince George’s County. Our organization centers and uplifts people of color and those impacted by the criminal legal system.

According to Dignity in Schools, there is no evidence that law enforcement in schools makes the school environment safer.¹ In fact, Dignity in School notes that having police in schools typically escalates situations when officers are used to discipline students which puts them at risk for school suspensions and arrests. What we do know is that Black students are often given fewer chances than their white counterparts. Monique Morris in her co-authored report “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood” found that Black children but especially Black girls are perceived as less innocent and less deserving of care or second chances.² Looking at the data in Maryland, Black students overwhelmingly made up the majority of school suspensions and expulsions.³

It is critical that students receive counseling services, mental health supports, support for trauma practices, and restorative practice. While the Mental Health Foundation found that only 10% of young people between 5 and 16 have a mental illness, 70% of “children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age⁴.” Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has created added stress for students and parents which may linger even after schools are able to reopen safely. The need for supports for students is clear. In fact, the ACLU noted that schools that provided these services, “see improved attendance rates, better academic achievement,

¹ <https://dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WhyCounselorsNotCops.pdf>

² <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>

³ <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20182019Student/2019SuspensionsbySchoolOUT.pdf>

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<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people#:~:text=50%25%20of%20mental%20health%20problems.and%2075%25%20by%20age%2024.&text=10%25%20of%20children%20and%20young.at%20a%20sufficiently%20early%20age.>



and higher graduation rates as well as lower rates of suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary incidents⁵.”

We cannot afford to criminalize students; instead, we need to give them the resources they need to manage their emotions, develop strong practices, and thrive in and out of school.

Thank you,

Community Justice

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⁵ <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors>