



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

POSITION: SUPPORT

Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence (MDPGV) aims to reduce gun violence in Maryland through evidence-based solutions. The Kevin L. Cooper Foundation aims to mobilize Baltimore City residents to make an impact in the reduction of inner city youth deaths due to violence. Rev. Dr. Greta Willis is the Director of Community Engagement for MDPGV and the founder of the Kevin L. Cooper Foundation, which is named after her son, who was killed by police violence. MDPGV, the Kevin L. Cooper Foundation, and Reverend Dr. Willis support HB 496, which redirects \$10 million in state funds from school police towards student mental health services and other supports.

Police Presence Does Not Make Schools Safe. One of the major justifications for putting police – or “School Resource Officers” (SROs) – in schools is the belief that doing so will prevent school shootings or other school-based violence. Research has shown, however, that the SRO model has not achieved this impact:

- The Federal Emergency Response Agency (FEMA) and Center for Homeland Defense and Security [recently summarized](#) “accumulating research [which] has shown that the conspicuous security, including the presence of school resource officers, have little to no effect in preventing school shootings, or reducing casualties.”
- A [2020 investigation](#) of the impact of expansions of school policing in Florida, following the Parkland school shooting (where an SRO was unable to stop the shooter), shows that found “little consistent evidence that the presence of law enforcement decreased the number of behavioral incidents occurring, indicating that school-based law enforcement were not necessarily making schools safer”

- A study of approximately 3,000 schools nationwide found “[no evidence suggesting that SRO or other sworn law-enforcement contribute to school safety](#)”
- An analysis of 111 shootings concluded that “[active shooters do not favor gun-free zones](#)” – which means that armed officers in schools are not likely to not deter gunmen
- A review of over 40 years of research found that the “[evidence . . . fails to support a safety effect](#)” associated with officer presence at schools

Police Presence Traumatizes Children from Communities that are Over-Policed. For children from neighborhoods and communities that experience over-policing and police violence, [seeing officers in the hallway and on the playground can be distracting and fear-inducing](#), undermining their ability to learn. MDPGV sees this first hand at the Grief Support Program, which we run for students at Liberty Elementary School in West Baltimore. Many students who participate in the program have witnessed parents or other family members being arrested, harassed, or taken away by the police. Because of this, they consistently report being scared of and intimidated by police officers. Even though many of these children have also been touched by gun violence, their experiences with police in the community make them feel less safe – not more – seeing police in schools.

Investments in Student Mental Health Will Improve School Safety. Many children who have suffered trauma develop a fight-or-flight response, which means that they can lash out and hurt others when they are triggered. Arresting these children in school, or subjecting them to law enforcement, does not improve their behavior; it just re-traumatizes them. In fact, some children with histories of trauma act out even more if they feel that they are under surveillance by school police. A more effective approach to helping these children resolve conflict and engage with others in peaceful ways is to address their underlying trauma. That includes ensuring that school staff understand and can respond to the impacts of childhood trauma, and providing children with comprehensive mental health services at school. [Schools become safer for everyone when we adopt these types of trauma-sensitive practices.](#)

HB 496 redirects state funds from school policing towards student mental health services and will help ensure that all children are safe and free from trauma in school. For these reasons, MDPGV, the Kevin L. Cooper Foundation, and Rev. Dr. Greta Willis urge a **FAVORABLE** report.