

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

TESTIMONY OF LEILANI JONES-JOHNSON

POSITION: SUPPORT

Hello, my name is Leilani and I am a 7th grader at Old Mill Middle North in Ann Arundel County. The police at school in my opinion are not needed. There are many white officers but not 1 police officer that represents people of color at Old Mill. When I was in sixth grade, I was suspended for fighting which is how I'm able to be here today and a police officer who was not on the scene wrote a report that was based on lies and what other people told him. Me and the girl I got into a fight with were off and on friends. Then one day we got into a fight and I got charged with 2nd-degree assault. It wasn't a fight where people had to go to the hospital, or get stitches. We didn't even throw punches. The officer that wrote the charges had a friendly relationship with me. He would give me fist bumps in the hallways. He said quote This doesn't change anything about our relationship. Unquote. Of course, it changed everything as he treated me like a criminal.

After I got the charges I had to appear in front of a DJS staff member which was over 7 months later. The charge was later removed and replaced as a warning. Many of my peers had other interactions with this school police officer. One interaction stood out to me. One of my peers was skipping class and the officer was called to take him down to the office. I'm not saying that he should have been skipping class but the consequences he got was unnecessary. He got 5 in-school suspensions for 1 day. The mindset that many young black teenagers have is that police officers are horrible and it doesn't help when we get arrested in school for making small mistakes. Most interactions don't feel good with police. So do I think that police should be out of schools absolutely. Thank you.