

March 3, 2021

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1089

Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and
Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act)

TO: Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways & Means
Committee

FROM: Michael English

My name is Mike English, and I live in Silver Spring in District 20. I am submitting testimony in support of HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act).

I've lived in Silver Spring for 8 years now and Maryland has become very important to me. While I do not have children of my own, we all, every one of us, are making decisions for other people's children when it comes to issues like this. Children who are criminalized due to over policing-now not only have their own futures altered, but that of the entire county. The implications are vast and increasingly clear.

This will hardly come as a shock to you, but growing up as an upper middle class white child in affluent suburban Connecticut, I didn't have much to fear from the single police officer in my school, nor did most of the children in my almost uniformly white school district. Yet these students still misbehaved, still cut class, and yes, from time to time engaged in petty theft and other issues that could have, by legal right, called for the attention of law enforcement. Yet, exactly because we were white, law enforcement was rarely involved. We all still graduated, still went to college, still got to enter the job market without a mark on our record. None of us were stuck in a pipeline to prison because of armed law enforcement.

As Maryland Public School arrest data shows, Black students are more likely than

white students to be perceived as blameworthy when they engage in the same behaviors as peers, and Black students receive 56% of school-based arrests in Maryland, despite comprising a third of the student population.^{1,2} This just isn't right, and half-steps will not right this wrong.

The national, state, and local data shows that alternatives to policing, such as social workers, restorative justice, and conflict resolution services, are more effective in supporting students than School Resource Officers. These are the services, proven to be successful in addressing student needs, that HB 1089 would fund.

The data presented in the Racial Equity Impact Statement prepared by the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight shows the harmful and inequitable impact of Montgomery County's SRO program on Black, Latinx, and disabled students. And Montgomery County is **not** an anomaly -- these disparate outcomes are present across the State. Supporting HB1089 and removing armed law enforcement officers from schools is a necessary step in perpetuating our state's school to prison pipeline.

The most reliable data and our state's values are clear. In order to improve racial equity, we must invest in counselors, not cops. I urge you to vote in support of HB1089.

Sincerely,

Michael English

¹ MSDE, Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data, School Year 2018-19

² Re-Imagining School Safety, *Public Justice Center*, slide 7,

<http://www.publicjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/School-Police-Statewide-with-Legislation-1-15-21.pdf>