

February 3, 2021

Melissa Coretz Goemann
Silver Spring, MD 20901



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB496

**Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion
(Counselors Not Cops Act)**

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

FROM: Melissa Coretz Goemann, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUF)

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann and I live in District 20 in Silver Spring, Maryland. I am writing this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice in favor of HB496, Primary and Secondary Education - Mental Health Services - Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act). JUF organizes more than 5,500 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

Jewish text teaches us that in all we do, we must work towards justice: “Tzedek, tzedek tirdof - Justice, justice shall you pursue.” As we work towards more equitable schools in Maryland, we must actively strive for justice. HB496 brings us a step closer towards that pursuit.

I have spent most of my career focused on youth justice policy, currently as the Senior Policy Counsel for the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN). During my years of work on youth justice policy, I have studied the significant role that school resource officers (SROs) and other school-based police officers play in driving youth into the juvenile justice system, a phenomenon that is now commonly known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” A growing body of research has not found evidence that schools with SROs are safer.¹

However, we do know that there are ways to measurably increase school safety that do not expand the school-to-prison pipeline — methods such as “restorative approaches, more mental health staff and counselors, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed care in our

¹ S. 4360, Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act (116th Congress, 2019-2020), <https://bit.ly/2Ja7EZr>.

schools.”² This is exactly what HB496 intends to do — provide funding for the types of resources that can best support students. A recent study by the John Hopkins University Institute for Education (JHU) of the implementation of restorative practices in 14 Baltimore City schools, after the first full year of adopting the practice, found that suspensions had decreased by 44% and school climate and relationships between teachers and students had improved.³ Additionally, a recent Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement by Montgomery County’s Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO), identified several best practices to advance racial equity and social justice within public schools, including more funding for school counselors, psychologists, and social workers; expanding positive behavioral interventions and supports; and expanding restorative justice, social and emotional learning, and empathetic discipline programs.⁴

I hope that this bill will provide sufficient funding to expand the number of school counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists so that every school meets the professional standards recommendation of at least 1 counselor and 1 social worker for every 250 students and at least 1 nurse and 1 psychologist for every 750 students and every 700 students, respectively.⁵ This will be particularly important after students return to school from the pandemic, due to the increased stress and trauma that all families have endured during this challenging time.

Children are regarded as the hope of the future, and among Jewish people this is further enhanced in that children are viewed as a divine trust. **JUFJ respectfully urges this committee to approve these appropriations to help safeguard our children’s future, and provide a favorable report on HB496.**

² ACLU Maryland, “The Future of Schooling: No Cops, More Counselors,” Sept. 29, 2020, <https://www.aclu-md.org/en/news/future-schooling-no-cops-more-counselors>.

³ OSI Baltimore, “Restorative Practices in Baltimore City Schools: Research Updates and Implementation Guide” (Sept. 2020): 6, <https://www.osibaltimore.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RP-Report-2020-FINAL.pdf>.

⁴ Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, “Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement - Bill 46-20: Police-School Resource Officers-Prohibited” (Dec. 7, 2020): 5, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2020/RESJ-Bill46-20.pdf>

⁵ S. 4360, Counseling not Criminalization in Schools Act (116th Congress, 2019-2020), <https://bit.ly/2Ja7EZr>.