

Submitted on: HB1089 for 3/3/2021 Ways and Means Committee

Name: Christopher Fraley

Organization: National Association of School Resource Officers – Region 2 Director

Bill: HB1089

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

Sponsored by: Delegate Acevero

Synopsis:

Repealing certain provisions of law relating to the establishment of the Baltimore City School Police Force; prohibiting a local school system from contracting with certain law enforcement agencies for a certain purpose; prohibiting a local school system from establishing its own police force; altering certain functions and duties of the Maryland Center for School Safety to require the Center to analyze certain data, to certify certain law enforcement coverage, and to submit a certain report; etc.

Testimony in Opposition of HB1089

Hello, my name is Christopher Fraley. I have two children that attend public schools currently in Maryland and two children that have graduated from public schools in Maryland and West Virginia. I am currently employed as a prevention resource officer (PRO) with the Mineral County WV Sheriff's Office. I also served as a school resource officer (SRO) from 2007 to 2020 in Allegany County MD. I have served for the past 5 years as the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) Region 2 Director which includes Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia and District of Columbia.

House Bill 1089 may appear on the face to be an "Expansion of Mental Health Services" which is critical; however, the key within the title is Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act). The benefits of school-based policing must be understood by your committee and the state before any legislation is considered to remove the entire profession. The students of our state need BOTH services – they need full wrap around services which should include positive school-based law enforcement.

The removal or restriction of school resource officers (SRO) from serving as safety partners in the school environment would increase the risk of school violence and decrease opportunities for law enforcement to build both positive relationships with

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youth and educate and informally counsel students about public safety and law-related matters, all of which enhance school and community safety. School Resource Officers (SRO) are career law enforcement officers that have attended required training within their specialized field. I would be remiss if I did not address the obvious – could there be officers that are assigned as SRO's that should not be? Of course, that is possible; however, with the Maryland Safe To Learn Act of 2018, the Maryland Legislators put many safeguards in place to ensure the MOST QUALIFIED officers are available for selection. To place legislation in place that removes an entire profession is unconscionable and unfair to the students and families of Maryland.

SRO's are not your average "beat officers". We are trained in restorative practices, mental health and counseling processes, and of course standard required law enforcement academy. We are within the school buildings first as a confidant for students, a resource for administrators, and often the only "good" authority figure that many students see. I say to EVERY STUDENT that I encounter, "I am not here to arrest you. I am here to be your friend. I am here to listen to you and help you work through what is happening in your life to get to the other side of it."

I understand from watching previous testimony that some fear that the mere existence of school resource officers will increase the volume of students placed in the school to prison pipeline. I vehemently disagree with this assessment. The Maryland State Department of Education gathers school-related arrests which refers to an arrest of a student for any activity conducted on school grounds, during off-campus school activities (including while taking school transportation), or due to a referral by any school official. This data can be found at:

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/index.aspx>

Unfortunately, what is missing in this data is the number of interactions between students and school resource officers that DO NOT end in arrest of students. I can attest to the data from Allegany County as I was responsible for a section of that data for the past 14 years. On average Allegany County (~8,000 students) has 8 arrests per year – 1% of the total student population and 0.3% of total incidents of 4,500. In the appendix attached you can review some of the counties that were reported under a Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA) request of a fellow Maryland citizen.

As for the appearance of school resources officers within a school building, we can best serve students and their families with a visible presence on the school campus just as

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standard law enforcement is within the communities to help prevent crime. The mere presence of law enforcement is not a form of intimidation it should be seen as one of many safety and security elements within a school. SRO's must have the ability to respond to an emergency involving violence or the threat of violence according to our agency's protocol in addition to responding to a summons by a school administrator or official after all other avenues have been applied to resolve the situation. School resource officers are on-duty law enforcement officers, and the wearing of civilian clothing and concealment of firearms is not practical. In situations which pose an imminent threat, any officers' uniformed presence can serve as a deterrent factor and can help everyone to quickly identify the acting officer as a law enforcement authority. It is important to remember that safety threats often involve individuals who are not students. NASRO believes decisions regarding concealment of firearms and the uniform apparel of school resource officers are best determined by the local school district, which is best aware of the culture, climate, and needs of its school communities.

I have been trained on the discipline restorative practices and understand that routine school discipline is not my place prior to any legislation. That said, NASRO endorses the legislative proposal of not having SRO's participate in the routine school discipline of a student so that it is clearly stated.

NASRO has found that communities which adhere to best practices overwhelmingly indicate satisfaction with their SRO programs. We believe that all communities — including those with significant policing issues — can have the same experience through reform versus discontinuation of SRO programs.

Thank you for your time in reading this testimony. I am available for further information if you require it and I can provide insight into how Region 2 states utilize school-based law enforcement for the betterment of their states and communities.

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NASRO Reg. 2 Director



Appendix A

**Note some data is missing as not yet received or incomplete when received*

2017-2018					
	Student Population	Incidents	% of Students w/ Incidents	Arrests	% Incidents turned Arrests
Allegany	8,539	4,948	57.9%	5	0.1%
Anne Arundel	82,777	30,068	36.3%	334	1.1%
Calvert	15,908	8,359	52.5%	138	1.7%
Caroline	5,787	743	12.8%	94	12.7%
Frederick	42,320	11,893	28.1%	NR	
Harford	37,796	25,544	67.6%	129	0.5%
Howard	56,799	25,235	44.4%	88	0.3%
Prince George's	135,939	13,126	9.7%	350	2.7%
Somerset	2,930	2,650	90.4%	9	0.3%
2018-2019					
	Student Population	Incidents	% of Students w/ Incidents	Arrests	% Incidents turned Arrests
Allegany	8,467	5,206	61.5%	14	0.3%
Anne Arundel	83,249	30,024	36.1%	356	1.2%
Calvert	15,936	8,169	51.3%	185	2.3%
Caroline	5,829	748	12.8%	103	13.8%
Frederick	43,002	14,171	33.0%	40	0.3%
Harford	37,828	26,638	70.4%	215	0.8%
Howard	57,907	25,261	43.6%	72	0.3%
Prince George's	132,636	13,267	10.0%	311	2.3%
Somerset	2,905	3,813	131.3%	7	0.2%
2019-2020					
	Student Population	Incidents	% of Students w/ Incidents	Arrests	% Incidents turned Arrests
Allegany	8,321	3,728	44.8%	5	0.1%
Anne Arundel	84,984	17,475	20.6%	NR	
Calvert	16,022	5,784	36.1%	140	2.4%
Caroline	5,875	457	7.8%	83	18.2%
Frederick	43,992	10,236	23.3%	14	0.1%
Harford	38,455	17,777	46.2%	58	0.3%
Howard	58,868	15,097	25.6%	NR	
Prince George's	132,322	5,785	4.4%	274	4.7%
Somerset	2,818	2,471	87.7%	2	0.1%