

March 3, 2021

Carol Stern  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

**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:** Carol Stern

My name is Carol Stern from Chevy Chase, District 16. I am providing this testimony in support of HB1089, Primary and Secondary Education – Expansion of Mental Health Services and Prohibition of School Resource Officers (Police-Free Schools Act).

In my Jewish tradition, *teshuvah*, repentance, is a core principle. Jews believe that people can always repent from their mistakes and bad choices, and that society should be structured to encourage that process. Removing school resource officers (SROs) from schools is an important way for our government to facilitate *teshuvah*, healing, and recovery rather than perpetuating the school to prison pipeline, which disproportionately affects Black and brown students.

Employing SROs is an unfair systemic structure that does not offer students the help they might need. Every police officer in a school should be replaced with a mental health professional, counselor or community resource coordinator. In addition, there are proven and promising strategies that can be implemented with removal of SROs such as restorative and trauma informed approaches, wraparound services, and/or special education planning and implementation.

As a mother and grandmother, I am horrified that in Maryland because of SROs in most middle and high schools, 70% of school arrests are for fistfights without weapons and offenses like disruption/disrespect, alcohol/tobacco, and trespassing. The remainder are mostly for simple drug possession.<sup>1</sup> These are instances when police were NOT needed to handle the offense. Any situation in a school that actually required police intervention could be handled easily with a 911 call.

**I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1089, which will be a step toward eliminating the school to prison pipeline caused by the presence of police in our Maryland schools.**

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<sup>1</sup> MSDE, Maryland Public Schools Arrest Data, School Year 2018-19.