

HB0613_PhyllisKLerner_UNFAVORABLE
Date of Hearing: 3/08/2022

Phyllis K. Lerner
Bethesda, MD 20815

TESTIMONY ON HB#0613 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE
Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures - Increase

TO: Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Phyllis K Lerner

OPENING: My name is Phyllis K Lerner. I am a resident of District 8. I am submitting this testimony against HB#0613, Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures - Increase.

I was born locally when my family lived on Ridgewood Avenue in Chevy Chase. There were still covenants against Jews and Negroes. My primary grade school days began with The Lord's Prayer. Times have changed and more importantly, people have changed our times. I have been an advocate and educator throughout my professional and personal life. This means working for equitable youth opportunities, across every point on the diversity spectrum. My Jewish values, including Tikkun Olam or healing the world, have led to extensive educational projects from the refugee camps along the Thai border to a post-genocide high school in Rwanda. I currently teach at Johns Hopkins University in the Graduate School of Education. While service to global youth remains crucial, the pandemic has required my *shoes be on the ground*, here in Maryland. If we can not do the needed educational transformation here, I cannot imagine persisting elsewhere.

This is **not** the time or place to increase SRO funding by \$10 million dollars to local school systems, beginning in 2023. The windfall of monies would merely expand policing policies and practices which negatively impacted children of color. From a 5 year old kindergartener, who walked off campus, to a hand-cuffed teen with special needs, the results are traumatic.

Punishing and criminalizing children goes back to when schools began. Some painful patterns remained evident, after *Brown v. Board of Education* and, in the 1980's, when the *war on crime* crept into schools. Highly controlling discipline plans underlie the *school to prison pipeline*. This is the pervasive result when young children are lined up in the hall, hands behind their backs and walked silently to lunch. For the well-being of all children, we have moved away from punitive hierarchies—systems which reflect racial inequities around suspensions, expulsions and arrests. The problem with punishment is it uses shame, rather than teaching and reflection, as the tool to address what is at best whether it's a racist, sexist or anti-semitic act. Shame doesn't get anyone close to the truth; it simply forces compliance, which leads to anger. The better answer in these situations is obvious to me. It's education, education, education - not policing.

This bill is an inefficient and biased response to students' behavior. It yet again yanks kids out of the river when they are already weak, under-served and traumatized. We need to go up-river, now, and heal schools and communities with social and emotional support and funding. That's where the money must go. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a unfavorable report on HB#0613.**