

March 8, 2022

Toby Ditz
Baltimore, MD 21217

TESTIMONY ON HB613—POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

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

FROM: Toby Ditz

My name is Toby Ditz, and I live in Baltimore City in District 40. This testimony is in opposition to HB613 Public Schools-Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures—Increase.

My Jewish tradition teaches me that “a person who says to themselves, ‘why should I trouble myself? Let my soul dwell in peace’ helps destroy the world.” (Midrash Tanhuma, Mishpatim 2). We have an ethical duty as Jews to act publicly in the face of racial injustice.

Last year, in the wake of the nationwide protests that followed the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the Maryland General Assembly passed sweeping police reform legislation, and this year I understand that Assembly may convene a working group to consider the entire topic of police and alternatives to police in schools. This bill turns the spirit of last year’s reforms upside down and preempts efforts at further reform! It moves us in the completely wrong direction.

One main goal of police reform is to reduce the scope of policing in favor of alternative approaches to public safety. Another is to eliminate the racially disparate harms of over-policing. HB613 contradicts both of these goals by asking for a huge expansion, not reduction of expenditures for police in schools.

Children deserve to get an education safe from the threat of discriminatory treatment and arrest. Only 36 percent of all students enrolled in Maryland public schools are Black, yet they make up 56 percent of referrals to law enforcement.¹ Here in Maryland, police in the schools

¹ “Replace Police with Student Supports,” *MCJPA*.

https://www.aclu-md.org/sites/default/files/police_schoolpolice_onepager_2020.pdf The Maryland Commission on

end up criminalizing individual behaviors for what are typically minor infractions of school conduct codes. Evidence-based national research does not show that police in schools reduces violence. It does show that students in schools staffed with police officers are five times more likely to be arrested for minor offenses like “disorderly conduct” than students in schools that are not. Thus police in schools are a significant factor in the “school to prison pipeline”: they pull children, especially Black and brown children and students with disabilities, into the criminal justice system and, thus, contribute to Maryland’s very high rates of incarceration of young Black men.²

What all the evidence calls for is fewer, not more police in schools. Less money for police, more for alternative routes to safety and equitable outcomes in school; more mental health counselors, nurses, and social workers in our schools, not more police.

I respectfully urge this committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB 613. Thank you.

the School-to-Prison Pipeline found even higher rates: black students made up 66% of all school related arrests in 2015-16. [Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices: Final Report and Collaborative Action Plan: Report to the Maryland Governor and General Assembly pursuant to House Bill 1287 \(2017\)](#), 28.

² “Replace Police with Student Supports,” *MCJPA*; [Maryland Commission on the School to Prison Pipeline](#), pp. 26-29.