



Youth As Resources, Inc. (YAR)
111 North Charles Street, suite 502
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 576-9551x1
www.youthasresources.org

Appropriations – Public Schools – Appropriations for school safety expenditures -- Increase

Presented to the Honorable Mike Griffith

March 8, 2022 -- 1pm

POSITION: OPPOSE

Testimony of Youth As Resources

Youth As Resources **strongly opposes HB 613 – Public Schools – Appropriations for school safety expenditures – Increase** introduced by the honorable Mike Griffith. We urge the House’s Appropriations Committee to not support this bill.

Youth As Resources, (YAR) is a youth-led grantmaking, community organizing and leadership development non-profit organization. We provide the funding, training, and support to Baltimore youth to develop strategies that address our critical issues and positively impact the community. We are governed by a Board of Directors currently comprised of 20 youth and young adults (ages 14-24), The Board adopts an issue organizing and advocacy agenda each year. We have been organizing around school police accountability since 2014.

We are youth and we talk to youth. To date, we have held school police focus groups with over 2,500 youth to build our base, get input and educate our peers on their rights. We also convene a school police roundtable with youth, adult allies and policy advocates. As a result of our work, new policies recommended by Baltimore City youth were included in the school police policies and general orders. These included clearer guidelines around force and school discipline, training recommendations including requiring youth-led training for school police officers and the institutionalization of the school police rating tool (report card) designed to gauge the interactions and relationships between school police and students.

Last year, the Coalition organizing to remove school police in Baltimore City Schools presented to us and requested our support. To make an informed decision we wanted to learn more about where our peers stood on the issue. We administered a student survey and facilitated five focus groups with our peers. We asked for feedback around removing school police in an unbiased way. In other words, we did not present any argument or data. And although we continue to be concerned that students including us do not always feel safe, we did not find significant support for retaining police in schools. About 60% felt that police should be removed

from the schools and another 20% were not sure. Even amongst those who felt that police should be in schools; most wanted changes such as having school police not wear uniforms and not get involved in fights and conflict.

Although over the years we have received feedback on positive experiences with school police officers in Baltimore City; too many students still report that they believe school police use force not appropriate to the situation and/or their involvement does more to increase conflict than to diffuse. We are appreciative of the school police officers who care about us, build positive relationships with us and do not treat us like suspects on the street. However, there are still a significant amount of school police officers who want to arrest us, violate our rights, and bully us. Tempress, a Youth As Resources Board Member and Organizer said, "I had an incident at my high school and as a result the school police officer searched me every day. I didn't know why and didn't know at the time that probably violated my rights. In middle school, a group of school police officers were always at our bus stop. I used to get bullied and they just watched. I was visibly upset, and the officers said they were not going to do anything because we were grown, no one was physically fighting and "they do not get paid enough" to do anything about kids arguing."

Tori, another Youth As Resources Board Member and Organizer said, "In high school not only did the school police officer search me, but he also harassed me, got smart, and told other students not to be around me. I later learned that he was not supposed to even search me for smelling like weed (allegedly). I just wanted to be in class and not be bothered by him. Other students felt the same way. One time he demanded a student take his headphones off (a school discipline issue that he was not supposed to be involved in), took them and never returned them."

As we continue to organize and get input from our peers; this school year (post pandemic) there seems to be an increase in these kinds of stories. Unfortunately, there is a significant gap between the policies we worked so hard to get adopted and the practices of school police.

The Baltimore City Public School System spends about three times more on school police compared to mental health, healing and restorative programs and resources. This does not make sense because the following are repeated student recommendations for resources:

- Security staff to replace school police including hall monitors.
- More mental health counselors.
- Increased programs and staff to address school climate, trauma, stress and wellness.
- Safe spaces in schools where students and/or staff could go to get help and/or decompress.
- Peer-to-peer programming where we could support each other.

For these reasons, we implore you to not increase funding from school police and help students get the resources they really need and want.