

Date of Hearing March 8, 2022

Heidi Rhodes
Colesville, MD 20904

TESTIMONY ON HB0613 - UNFAVORABLE

Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures - Increase

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

FROM: Heidi Rhodes

OPENING: My name is Heidi Rhodes. I am a resident of District 14. I am submitting this testimony against HB0613, Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures - Increase.

I am a leader of the Social Justice Committee at Oseh Shalom Congregation in Laurel, MD. One of our core missions is to erase systemic racism in Maryland. As part of this mission I was involved in the efforts to remove School Resource Officers (SRO) from Montgomery County Schools last year. During that effort and during the discussion on SROs in last year's MDGA session, I listened to over 100 testimonies both for and against SROs in schools. What I learned is that adding additional money to this fund would continue the traumatization of black and brown students and students with disabilities, and perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline at taxpayers expense.

In this time when students are so traumatized by what is happening in the world, what they need to keep them safe is mental health supports. That is where this additional money should be going. Allocating resources to increase school-based mental health services, restorative justice approaches to safety and discipline, wraparound services, and trauma-informed care, are a proven way to increase school safety. Counselors and other mental health services promote healing and development which can prevent violence by dealing with the trauma that is leading to it. The money needs to be put toward healing, not harm.

Adding more police in schools will not make our schools safer, but will instead promote the incarceration of minors and the over-policing of Black and Brown students and students with disabilities in schools. **I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on HB0613.**