

HB0613  
Melissa Coretz Goemann  
Silver Spring, MD 20901  
UNFAVORABLE  
March 8, 2022

**TESTIMONY ON HB0613 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE**  
**Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures - Increase**

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

**FROM:** Melissa Coretz Goemann

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann. I am a resident of District 20. I am submitting this testimony in opposition to HB0613, Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety expenditures - Increase.

I have lived in Silver Spring, Maryland, for the past ten years and from 1995-2000 and sent my children to Montgomery County public schools during the times that we lived here. For the past two decades, my work has been primarily focused on youth justice reform as a policy advocate. I am currently the Senior Policy Counsel for the National Juvenile Justice Network. I am also an active member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda, Maryland.

I am deeply concerned about this bill because it supports the misguided notion that all we need to do to keep our children completely safe from harm in schools is to heavily police them and that this will have no negative impact. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, a recent study found that children are 2.83 times **more** likely to be killed when armed guards are present in school.<sup>1</sup> Police presence in schools also exacerbates the school-to-prison pipeline. Stationing police officers in schools drives up arrests of children - mainly for minor, disciplinary incidents that could and should be handled by the school administration so that children are not saddled with an arrest record. These arrests are disproportionately arrests of children of color; while white children commit these infractions at similar rates they are not as regularly arrested for them.

As the Montgomery County's Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) stated in their Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement on our County's police free schools bill, "A review of the research suggests that school-police partnerships, even those aligned with best practices, lead to higher arrest rates and may not offer the best investment for improving students'

---

<sup>1</sup> Jillian Peterson, James Densley, and Gina Erickson, "Presence of Armed School Officials and Fatal and Nonfatal Gunshot Injuries During Mass School Shootings, United States, 1980-2019," *JAMA Network Open* 2021;4(2):e2037394. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.37394.

learning environments.” Not only did the OLO find that schools with school resource officers (SROs) have higher arrest rates than schools without SROs, their research on the demographics of MCPS arrests found that Black students are over-represented in school-based arrests in the County, accounting for 47% of all arrests in MCPS schools even though they only account for 22% of MCPS enrollment.<sup>2</sup>

It has been two years of a worldwide pandemic and we are all hurting, especially our children. The number of children experiencing mental health challenges during the pandemic has increased so dramatically that the U.S. Surgeon General issued an Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health in 2021.<sup>3</sup> Instead of looking for a quick and easy fix to safeguard our children, we must do the hard work of building trauma-informed schools and providing ample mental health supports for our children and staff. We cannot police our way out of this problem.

I urge this committee to reject the supposed quick fix of stationing even more police in the hallways of our schools and, instead, provide more funding for schools to increase mental health staff and resources - something desperately lacking in many schools. Such funding would provide much more long-lasting help and protection for our children and does not have the downside of over-criminalizing our children.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on HB0613.**

---

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, Final Report and Collaborative Action Plan (2018), <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/media/SOL/pdfs/Programs/ADR/STPP%20%20RP%20Commission%20Final%20Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> United States Surgeon General, “Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory” (Washington, DC: 2021), <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>.