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**HB 613 - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures – Increase**  
**Hearing before the House Appropriations Committee, March 8, 2022**

**Position: OPPOSE**

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Education Stability Project advocates racial equity in public education by combatting the overuse of exclusionary school discipline practices, like suspension, expulsion, and school policing, that disproportionately target Black and brown children and push students out of school. **PJC OPPOSES HB 613**, which increases the \$10 million/year state School Resource Officer (SRO) Fund to \$20 million/ year for fiscal year 2024 and every fiscal year thereafter.

**Police Presence Does Not Make Schools Safe.** Popular perception is that the presence of an armed officer in schools would deter individuals from committing egregious crimes (i.e. mass shootings, or other school-based violence), but decades of research says otherwise. Research has shown that the SRO model has not achieved this impact:

- In an article published by The Center for Homeland Defense and Security, summarized “accumulating research [which] has shown that the conspicuous security, including the presence of school resource officers, have little to no effect in preventing school shootings, or reducing casualties.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moe, Caitlin, and Ali Rowhani-Rahbar. “What We Know about School Mass Shootings since Columbine and How to Prevent Them.” K-12 School Shooting Database. The Federal Emergency Response Agency and Center for Homeland Defense and Security, September 15, 2020. <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/what-we-know-about-school-mass-shootings-since-columbine-and-how-to-prevent-them/>.

- In a recent study done by Brown University, researchers found that SROs “do not prevent school shootings or gun-related incidents.”<sup>2</sup>
- A 2020 investigation of the impact of expansions of school policing found that there is “little consistent evidence that the presence of law enforcement decreased the number of behavioral incidents occurring, indicating that school-based law enforcement were not necessarily making schools safer.”<sup>3</sup>

In practice, rather than stopping school shootings or other major safety threats, the school police model has the effect of punishing routine childhood and adolescent behavior with criminal consequences. For example, students in schools with police are twice as likely to be arrested for run-of-the-mill fights and five times as likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct.<sup>4</sup> In Maryland, approximately 70% of school arrests are for fights without weapons, disruption/disrespect, trespassing, and similarly low-level offenses; the remainder are mostly for simple drug possession.<sup>5</sup> Rather than preventing the most heinous of crimes, police in schools often punish the most trivial low-level offenses.

**Police Presence In Schools Disproportionately Harms Black Students and Students With Disabilities.** The over-policing and harsh treatment that Black people and people with disabilities experience at the hands of police is mirrored in schools across the country. Research has shown that Maryland is no exception to this trend as it is found that:

- Black students receive 56% of school arrests in Maryland, even though they are only a third of the student population, and research has found no differences in student behavior across race.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sorensen, Lucy C., Montserrat Avila Acosta, John Engberg, and Shawn D. Bushway. “The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing across the U.S.” EdWorkingPapers.com. Brown University, October 2021. <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai21-476>.

<sup>3</sup> Curran, F. Chris. Rep. *The Expanding Practice of Law Enforcement in Florida Schools*. University of Florida, 2020. [https://www.aclufl.org/sites/default/files/curran\\_-\\_the\\_expanding\\_presence\\_of\\_law\\_enforcement\\_in\\_florida\\_schools.pdf](https://www.aclufl.org/sites/default/files/curran_-_the_expanding_presence_of_law_enforcement_in_florida_schools.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Dignity in Schools Campaign, A Resource Guide on Counselors Not Cops (2016), [http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource\\_Guide-on-CNC-1.pdf](http://www.dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Resource_Guide-on-CNC-1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Maryland State Dep’t of Education, Maryland Public Schools School-Based Arrest Data 2018-19, <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20182019Student/2019SuspensionsbySchoolOUT.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

- Students with IEPs receive 23% of school arrests in Maryland, even though they are only 12% of the student population.<sup>7</sup>

The disproportionate impact extends beyond arrests to disciplinary removals. Researchers at Brown University observed that SROs “intensify the use of suspensions, expulsions, police referrals, and arrests of students” to which the effects “are consistently over two times larger for Black students than White students.”<sup>8</sup>

**Over-Policing In Schools Can Traumatize Children and Undermine Academic Achievement.** Children who are from neighborhoods and communities that have experienced over-policing and police-based violence, found that the presence of police officers in the school can be distracting and fear-inducing.<sup>9</sup> By creating an atmosphere of surveillance in schools, and subjecting students to an increased likelihood of arrest and suspension when they make minor childhood mistakes, SRO presence undermines students' ability to focus on learning. In a study that examines the long-term exposure of police in New York City, researchers found that young Black males had lower standardized test scores.<sup>10</sup> In another study examining the effects of long-term exposure of police in schools, in Texas, researchers found a 2.5% drop in high school graduation and a 4% drop in college enrollment.<sup>11</sup> By contributing to school pushout via the school-to-prison pipeline, police in school are increasing the likelihood that children drop out of school.<sup>12</sup>

**Investments in Student Mental Health are Effective Alternatives to SROs.** Alongside the substantial research demonstrating that the SRO model has failed to advance school safety is research showing that other strategies can and do make schools safer. For example, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) which is currently implemented in thousands of schools across the nation, is a great investment for supporting positive behavior in students. PBIS has been shown in Maryland to reduce truancy and suspension rates and improve academic achievement.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, research has shown that schools employing PBIS experienced 20 – 60 percent reduction in disciplinary matters and

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<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Sorensen, Lucy C., Montserrat Avila Acosta, John Engberg, and Shawn D. Bushway. “The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing across the U.S.” EdWorkingPapers.com. Brown University, October 2021. <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai21-476>.

<sup>9</sup> Curran , F. Chris, Aaron Kupchik , and Benjamin W. Fisher . “The Good-Guy Image Police Present to Students Often Clashes with Students' Reality.” The Conversation. The Conversation, June 5, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/the-good-guy-image-police-present-to-students-often-clashes-with-students-reality-139821>.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Fagan and Joscha Legewie, Aggressive Policing and the Educational Performance of Minority Youth, 84 Amer. Soc'l Rev. 220 (2019)

<sup>11</sup> Emily K. Weisburst, Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for School Police on Student Discipline and Long-Term Education Outcomes, 38 J. Pol'y Analysis & Mgmt. 338 (2019)

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> ELISA PAS ET AL., PBIS MARYLAND, TESTING THE EFFECTS OF SW-PBIS IN MARYLAND STATE (2017), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h\\_pgSPOWT6MoHhSr9hoJ77TzpGBoxbaO/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h_pgSPOWT6MoHhSr9hoJ77TzpGBoxbaO/view).

reduced racial disparities in discipline.<sup>14</sup> Restorative justice, another strategy for supporting school safety and positive student behavior, has had many successes across school in America. This strategy emphasizes teaching students problem-solving, the mediation of disputes to prevent undesirable behavior from happening in the future. Since implementing Restorative Justice model, the Denver Public School System saw a 70 percent reduction in expulsions and suspensions.<sup>15</sup> The disproportionate impacts of discipline towards Black and students of color in Maryland can improve with more funding and effort being poured into effective alternatives rather than resorting to the ineffective practice of using SROs.

The Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a unfavorable report on HB 613. For questions, please contact Fredson Desravines at 410-625-9409 x 269 or [desravinesf@publicjustice.org](mailto:desravinesf@publicjustice.org).

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<sup>14</sup> JUDGE DAVID L. BAZELON CTR. FOR MENTAL HEALTH L., WAY TO GO FACT SHEET # 1 2 (2006), <http://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/WayToGo1.pdf>; see Jessica Swain-Bradway et al., *Do Wisconsin Schools Implementing an Integrated Academic and Behavior Support Framework Improve Equity in Academic and School Discipline Outcomes?*, CTR. ON POSITIVE BEHAV. INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (2019), [https://assets-global.website-files.com/5d3725188825e071f1670246/5d82aa7feb813389e04fabad\\_Wisconsinpercent20Integratedpercent20Academicpercent20andpercent20Behaviorpercent20Supportpercent20Framework.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/5d3725188825e071f1670246/5d82aa7feb813389e04fabad_Wisconsinpercent20Integratedpercent20Academicpercent20andpercent20Behaviorpercent20Supportpercent20Framework.pdf); See Michelle M. Masar et al., *Do Out-of-School Suspensions Prevent Future Exclusionary Discipline?*, CTR. ON POSITIVE BEHAV. INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (2015), <https://www.pbis.org/resource/do-out-of-school-suspensions-prevent-future-exclusionary-discipline>.

<sup>15</sup> CHILD. DEF. FUND, REFORMING DISCIPLINE IN DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THREE PRONGED APPROACH FOR EQUITY AND JUSTICE 2 (2018), [https://www.childrendefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Denver-Public-Schools-Profile\\_Final-PDF.pdf](https://www.childrendefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Denver-Public-Schools-Profile_Final-PDF.pdf).