



**Testimony in opposition to
House Bill 738: Public Schools – Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures –
Increase (School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023)**

**House Appropriations Committee
Position: Oppose**

March 16, 2023

Strong Schools Maryland is a network of education advocates dedicated to ensuring the full funding and faithful implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. We are also a member of the Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD), which brings together advocates, service providers, and community members to transform school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. **Strong Schools Maryland urges an unfavorable vote on House Bill 738**, which if enacted would increase, from \$10 million to \$20 million, certain annual appropriations in order to expand law enforcement and school resource officers in Maryland public schools.

The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future envisions a World-Class system of public schools for our state’s students. Critical to that World-Class system is safe learning environments that allow teachers to teach and students to learn. The Blueprint acknowledges the importance of restorative practices as a means to create these safe environments that build a sense of belonging, safety, and social responsibility for everyone in the school community. However, not only does House Bill 738 not further the Blueprint’s vision, but it also creates unnecessary opportunities for discrimination and trauma rather than the safety it claims to promote.

Police presence in schools **does not** make schools safer from egregious crimes such as school shootings, as proven by accumulating research.¹ Further, the presence of school resource officers **disproportionately impacts** black students and students with disabilities. In the 2018–2019 school year, black students received 56% of school arrests in Maryland, despite being only a third of the student population.² In that same year, students with IEPs received 23% of school arrests in Maryland, even though they were 12% of the student population.³ Data shows that **the use of restorative practices** – not increased law enforcement – improves outcomes for students and can also improve overall school safety. In Montgomery County, pilot schools that implemented a restorative justice program reported a 70% decline in office referrals for misconduct.⁴ After Baltimore City Schools implemented restorative practices in their pilot schools, suspensions fell by 44% in one school year.⁵

It is the responsibility of the Maryland General Assembly to advance legislation that fosters trustworthy relationships between schools and students. Additional funding of school resource officers is incompatible with a cohesive commitment to the Blueprint.

We urge this committee to reject House Bill 738, and instead utilize this Session to advance legislation that promotes restorative practices strategies that are reflective of the highest-achieving schools in the world.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 738.

*For more information, contact Maddie Long:
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¹ [O'Neill and McGloin, 2007](#)

² [MSDE 2019](#)

³ *Id.*

⁴ [Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices, 2018](#)

⁵ [Deborah T. Eisenberg et al., 2018](#)