



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of H.B. 738

Public Schools – Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures – Increase

(School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023)

I'm requesting a favorable report on H.B. 738, the *Public Schools – Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures – Increase (School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023)*, which doubles the funding for School Resource Officers (SRO) statewide from 10 million to 20 million starting in fiscal year 2025.

The need for this increased support is more evident than ever. Over the last several decades, we have seen a rapid increase not only in the number of violent and criminal incidents occurring in our schools but also in the severity of those incidents.

This upward trend prompted the Maryland General Assembly in 2019 to unanimously pass legislation to allocate 10 million for SRO funding statewide but despite this, the trend of increased incidents on school grounds has continued to climb. This is further exacerbated by the fact that only 19.5% of all Maryland public schools have a full-time SRO. With such a low percentage and the increased number of incidents on school grounds, students, teachers, and administrative staff are left unprotected and potentially in harm's way.

Unfortunately, we've already seen this play out in our districts - just recently in an Anne Arundel County public school, an SRO received reports, investigated, found, and confiscated a handgun, loaded magazine, and lose ammunition in the possession of a 12-year-old student.

Then again in Harford County, residents, parents, and students of where I attended middle school – Aberdeen Middle School – watched the need for SROs play out in front of them when a male student touched female classmates inappropriately during a school dance. Once the SRO became aware of the incidents, they intervened and provided the protection the females and other students needed at that time.

In both cases, had the SROs not been present, there is no telling how the incidents could have escalated and resulted in further danger.

In addition to this protection, SROs also play a vital role in the lives of students and within the community, such as

1. Building impactful and meaningful relationships between children and law enforcement, which helps deter and prevent children from committing crimes in the future; and

2. Producing positive interactions with special needs students attending public schools across the state.

Oftentimes, special needs students, who sometimes act seemingly but unintentionally violent, know their school's assigned SRO, and develop a basic level of trust with them. In turn, the SRO understands what makes the students unique and can therefore provide an extra level of protection from outside harm. As a father of a special needs child in the Harford County Public School system, this level of protection, understanding, and guidance stemming from an SRO's relationship with my child brings a certain level of peace and security to my life.

For all these reasons and so many more, I request a favorable report on H.B. 738.