



## TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

### HB0738 – Public Schools – Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures – Increase (School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023)

**POSITION: Oppose**

**BY: Nancy Soreng, President**

**Date: March 16, 2023**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. LWVMD supports programs and reforms that promote equal access to quality education and ensure all students have access to research based programs. In addition, LWVMD is committed to [diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) in principle and in practice.

**LWVMD opposes HB0738 Public Schools – Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures – Increase (School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023)**, which increases funding for school resource officers from \$10 million to \$20 million. This bill ignores the evidence on the harms caused by having police officers in schools. School resource officers often deal with school discipline issues, which has increased the likelihood that students will come into contact with the juvenile justice system, and thus promote the school-to-prison pipeline. Black students and students with disabilities are disproportionately arrested. For example:

- Black students represent 56% of all school related arrests, even though they are 33% of the school population.<sup>1</sup>
- Students with disabilities make up just 12% of the student population but received 23% of all school arrests.<sup>2</sup>
- School-related arrests are not restricted to serious or dangerous behavior, but are often for minor misbehavior or disruptions rather than actions that endanger other students.
- School-related arrests criminalizes student behavior.

Maryland reported 3,141 arrests in the 2018-19 school year (the last year of data prior to the COVID pandemic). With a statewide enrollment of 909,414, the arrest rate was 3.4 arrests for every 1000

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. *Maryland Public Schools arrest data: School year 2018-2019*. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestDataSY20182019.pdf><https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestDataSY20182019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Id.

Maryland K-12 public school students. This was an increase from 3.1 arrests per 1000 students in the 2015-16 school year. Comparatively, the national school-related arrest rate was 2.2 per 1000 students.<sup>3</sup>

This bill ignores research-based interventions that are effective in improving school discipline and have the potential to reduce disparities. These strategies include: relationship building through approaches such as restorative practices;<sup>4</sup> social-emotional learning programs that help students understand social interactions and manage their emotions;<sup>5</sup> trauma-informed approaches;<sup>6</sup> and changing the structure of the disciplinary system or revising the disciplinary codes of conduct.<sup>7</sup>

HB 738 focuses on funding for school resource officers without considering the need to fund proven strategies that make schools safer and improve school discipline. Maryland needs to invest in supporting these strategies rather than providing additional funding for school resource officers.

We urge an unfavorable report on HB738.

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<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2019). 2017-18 civil rights data collection. <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/estimations/2017-2018>

<sup>4</sup> Gregory, A. & Evans, K. R. (2020). *The starts and stumbles of restorative justice in education: Where do we go from here?* Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/restorative-justice>

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4),1156-1171. <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cdev.12864>

<sup>6</sup> Jones, W., Berg, J. & Osher, D. (2018). *Trauma and learning policy initiative (TLPI): Trauma-sensitive schools, descriptive study, final report*. Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research. [https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TLPI-Final-Report\\_Full-Report-002-2-1.pdf](https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TLPI-Final-Report_Full-Report-002-2-1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Mediratta, K. (2017). Eliminating disparities in school discipline: A framework for intervention. *Review of Research in Education*,41(1). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X17690499>