
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

**EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
SENATE BILL 938
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – SCHOOL SAFETY AND STUDENT
WELL-BEING**

**POSITION: OPPOSE
March 15, 2023**

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public-school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD opposes SB 938**, which would allow for as much as a twofold increase in the amount of state dollars supporting the placement of police in public schools.

SB 938 would mandate an increase from \$10 million/year to \$20 million/year in the amount of state dollars allocated towards measures intended to improve school safety, including grants to fund the assignment of armed, uniformed police officers – referred to as school resource officers – to patrol public schools. Yet, mounting evidence clearly demonstrates that police presence does not make schools safer, criminalizes childhood and adolescent behavior, and exacerbates race- and disability-based disparities in education.

Regular Police Presence Makes Schools Less Safe, Not More, Particularly for Black Children and Children with Disabilities. Every Maryland school district stations police in its public schools on the theory that doing so will stop school shootings or reduce other types of violence. However, the true impact of the model is different:

- Numerous studies have concluded that police presence in schools does not prevent school shootings or prevent other school-based violence¹

¹ Caitlin Moe & Ali Rowhani-Rabar, What We Know About School Mass Shootings Since Columbine and How to Prevent Them (2019), <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/what-we-know-about-school-mass-shootings-since-columbine-and-how-to-prevent-them/> (citing “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”); Chongmin Na & Denise Gottfredson, Police Officers in School: Effects on School Crime & the Processing of Offending Behaviors, Justice Quarterly (2011), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754> (finding “no

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- Approximately 70% of school arrests in Maryland are for fights without weapons, disruption/disrespect, trespassing, and similarly low-level offenses; the remainder are mostly for simple drug possession²
- 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 race³
- Students with IEPs receive 23% of school arrests in Maryland, even though they are only 12% of the student population⁴
- Students arrested in school are 22 percentage points more likely to drop out than peers who share similar characteristics but do not face arrest⁵

In short, police presence in schools needlessly pushes students – particularly Black students and students with disabilities – out of school and into a pipeline to prison for engaging in developmentally-anticipated childhood and adolescent behavior, without improving school

evidence suggesting that SRO or other sworn law-enforcement contribute to school safety”); Chris Curran, *The Expanding Presence of Police in Florida Schools: Research Report* (2020), https://www.aclufl.org/sites/default/files/curran_the_expanding_presence_of_law_enforcement_in_florida_schools.pdf (“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”); Denise Gottfredson et al, *Effects of School Resource Officers on School Crime and Responses to School Crime*, *J. Criminology & Pub. Pol.* (2020) (“no empirical evidence supports th[e] claim” that school police stop shootings and in many of the highest profile school shootings nationwide the presence of armed school police failed to deter or stop shooters); Alex Yablon, *Do Armed Guards Prevent School Shootings?*, *The Trace* (April 6, 2019), <https://www.thetrace.org/2019/04/guns-armed-guards-school-shootings/> (“Armed guards don’t deter gunmen” at schools); Alexis Stern & Anthony Petrosino, *What Do We Know About the Effect of School-Based Law Enforcement on School Safety?* (2018), <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/JPRC-Police-Schools-Brief.pdf> (40 years of study “evidence . . . fails to support a safety effect” associated with officer presence at schools”)

² Maryland State Dep’t of Education, *Maryland Public Schools School-Based Arrest Data 2018-19*, <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DSFSS/SSSP/StudentArrest/MarylandPublicSchoolsArrestDataSY20182019.pdf> (Note: 2018-2019 school arrest data is the most recent available, excluding school years impacted by COVID-related school closures)

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ David S. Kirk & Robert Sampson, *Juvenile Arrest & Collateral Educational Consequences in the Transition to Adulthood*, *J. Sociol. Educ.* (2012), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4192649/>

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safety. SB 938 doubles the amount of state dollars that local districts can use towards school policing – from \$10 million annually to \$20 million annually – despite the failures and harms of this model.

Expanded Student Mental Health Services, Wraparound Supports, and Restorative Approaches Keep Schools Safe – But SB 938 Does Not Meaningfully Fund Such Strategies. Schools can employ proven strategies to keep students and educators safe without causing harm. Restorative approaches, for example, build positive relationships within school communities, facilitating the prevention and resolution of conflict and resulting in decreases in suspensions and improvements in school climate.⁶ Social-Emotional learning teaches students character skills, such as self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, empathy, and responsible decision-making, and has been shown to decrease emotional distress and violent behaviors/conduct problems.⁷ Additionally, trauma-informed practices help to minimize fight-or-flight responses for students who have suffered trauma, preventing behavior crises and making schools feel “safer” and “calmer.”⁸ But to implement these measures, schools need counselors, social workers, psychologists, restorative practitioners, and community school coordinators – and in Maryland, they have far from enough.⁹

SB 938 does not meaningfully support these proven school safety strategies. It allows districts to direct state funding towards “mediation” of inter-student disputes and services for students with “behaviors of concern,” but it does not require or incentivize districts to use funds in this manner. At the same time, the bill and the existing law it amends does not expressly permit - and thus arguably disallows - districts from investing state funds in social emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, restorative practices other than student-to-student mediation, and other preventative services. By paying only lip service to evidence-based strategies for

⁶ National Education Policy Center, *The Starts & Stumbles of Restorative Justice in Education: Where Do We Go From Here?* (2020),

https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Revised%20PB%20Gregory_0.pdf

⁷ Taylor, R. Oberle, E., Durlak, J. & Weissberg, R. , Promoting positive youth development through school-based social emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*. 88(4), 1156-1171. (2017),

<https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/cdev.12864>.

⁸ Wehmah Jones et al, *Trauma & Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI): Trauma-Sensitive Schools Descriptive Study*, American Institutes for Research (2018),

https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TLPI-Final-Report_Full-Report-002-2-1.pdf.

⁹ ACLU, *Cops & No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Services is Harming Students* (2019),

https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf

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improving student behavior, resolving conflict, and reducing violence, SB 938 will fail to keep students and schools safe.

In short, SB 938 doubles Maryland’s school safety funding to districts but continues to permit all those funds to be directed towards school policing, without requiring or even permitting districts to invest state dollars in a variety of more effective strategies. The likely impact is that many districts – particularly those that already tend towards over-policing students – will expand police presence in their schools, funneling students into the school-to-prison pipeline on the state’s dime.

For these reasons, CRSD strongly opposes SB938.

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