
MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY and the ENVIRONMENT SENATE BILL 819: Public Schools – School Resources Officers – Firearms Required

DATE: February 28, 2024

POSITION: OPPOSE

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. CRSD is committed to the fair and equitable treatment of all students, including pregnant or parenting students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic status, and reducing barriers to learning for all students. **CRSD opposes SB 819**, which requires a Baltimore City school police officer and a school resource officer to carry a firearm while on school premises.

Local control is a fundamental tenet in Maryland public policy. This bill violates that premise. This is the idea that each jurisdiction maintains control of the implementation of laws/policies to reflect the values and needs of its communities. Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) has a policing strategy that it deems is appropriate for creating a school environment that promotes school safety. Indeed, recent research on where shootings take place in Baltimore City found that shootings take place outside school buildings and that students feel safest in schools.¹

As the only local school system with its own dedicated police force, BCPS students experience greater police contact than any other student body across the state. The imposition of this law would only magnify that fact.

CRSD’s concern is threefold: (1) increasing the presence of lethally armed police officers in public schools would needlessly exacerbate the trauma experienced by many BCPS children; (2) the proposed legislation is a shift away from the proven restorative approaches BCPS has adopted; (3) policymakers will use the district’s limited resources to arm officers rather than prioritize needed educational and socio-emotional supports; and (4) arming school police is an unproven strategy for improving school safety.

As a Congressional Research Services report points out, the public response to issues of school safety and security too often focuses on violence prevention and incident response. The report notes: “. . . school safety and security also include issues related to bullying, harassment, childhood trauma, student mental health, substance abuse, school climate, and student discipline” all of which require different kinds of responses.² For example, Federal cross-agency efforts to address school violence have expanded to

¹ Bowie, L. & Vuttaluru, S. (February 2, 2023). How violent neighborhoods threaten otherwise safe Baltimore Schools. *Baltimore Banner*. <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/education/k-12-schools/shootings-near-baltimore-city-schools-PPIKB4DTKNCKBENO2CLFW4QUEY/>

² Congressional Research Service (August 10, 2021). *Federal support for school safety and security*. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46872/11>

support grant programs to increase mental health awareness among school-aged youth and school personnel and connect youth with mental health issues and their families to needed services. Other federal grant programs help local education agencies develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs and activities that foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement. Maryland needs more of these types of programs, not more guns in the schools.

There is a lack of meaningful data supporting the claim that arming school police increases school safety or lowers violent crime.³ On the other hand, there is substantial data that shows that even one instance of police contact increases the likelihood that a young person will have further involvement with the justice system, fall behind, and/or ultimately drop-out of school.⁴ Research also finds that a public health approach is the most effective way to address school safety.⁵

SB 819 undermines the intentions of the BCPS *Building A Generation: City Schools' Blueprint for Success*, which focuses on Student Wholeness and Staff Leadership, supports relationship-building pedagogy, and the implementation of restorative approaches to school discipline.⁶ Arming school police will not improve school safety or student well-being, and is likely to worsen school climate and student safety.

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CRSD Members:

The Choice Program at UMBC

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League of Women Voters of Maryland

³ Congressional Research Service, School Resource Officers: Law Enforcement Officers in Schools, 2018, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45251/3>.

⁴ Devlin, D. N. & Fisher, B. W. (2021). An examination of school resources officers as an approach to reduce social disturbances in schools: Evidence from a national longitudinal study. *Journal of School Violence*, 2.

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Stephanie Ann Wiley, The Amplification of Deviance Following Police Contact: An Examination of Individual and Neighborhood Factors among a Sample of Youth, July 2, 2014, 35,

<https://irl.umsl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1244&context=dissertation>.

⁵ Flannery, D. J., Fox, J. A., Wallace, L., Mulvey, E. & Modzeleski, W. (2020). Guns, school shooters, and school safety: What we know and directions for change. *School Psychology Review*: 50. 2-3.

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⁶ Baltimore City Public Schools. *Building a generation: City schools' Blueprint for Success*.

<https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/page/blueprint>

Baltimore Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (AROS)

Youth, Education and Justice Clinic, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law

Maryland Office of the Public Defender

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