



## Council on American-Islamic Relations

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Chair William Smith, Jr.  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

### **Re: Testimony Opposing SB454 Public Schools - School Resource Officers - Firearms Required**

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations Maryland (CAIR), we respectfully urge an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 454. CAIR is the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization with a mission to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims. Our work includes advocating for equitable and safe learning environments for all students.

SB 454 mandates that school resource officers carry firearms at all times while present on school grounds, eliminating the ability of local school systems, educators, and community stakeholders to make safety decisions tailored to the needs of their schools. School safety strategies vary significantly based on community conditions, student populations, and local expertise. Removing local discretion undermines collaborative safety planning and imposes a one-size-fits-all mandate that may not serve every school environment.

Research and student advocacy groups have repeatedly raised concerns that increased armed police presence in schools can create fear and anxiety rather than safety, particularly among students from marginalized communities. Many students, including Black, Latino, immigrant, Muslim, and refugee youth, already experience heightened concern about law enforcement interactions due to real or perceived profiling. Mandating firearms in schools risks intensifying those concerns and may discourage students from seeking support or reporting safety concerns.

Schools should be spaces focused on education, development, and trust-building, not environments where students feel surveilled or criminalized.

While school safety is a shared priority, research has not conclusively demonstrated that armed SROs prevent school shootings or other acts of violence. Safety experts consistently emphasize that comprehensive approaches - including mental health resources, threat assessment teams, violence prevention programs, and supportive school climates - are more effective in addressing root causes of school violence.

SB 454 focuses narrowly on armed presence rather than investing in evidence-based prevention strategies that protect students while supporting their well-being.

Mandating firearms increases the risk of escalation during routine student discipline situations or misunderstandings. Data across the country demonstrates that students of color and students with disabilities are disproportionately subject to school-based law enforcement actions. Policies that expand armed law enforcement roles in schools risk worsening disparities in school discipline and student arrests.

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Ensuring that students feel safe requires approaches that reduce conflict, promote de-escalation, and center student support.

Maryland has made meaningful progress in developing SRO training focused on de-escalation, disability awareness, and bias reduction. SB 454 moves away from that balanced approach by prioritizing armed presence over prevention and relationship-building strategies.

For these reasons, CAIR respectfully urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 454 and instead support policies that enhance school safety through prevention, mental health support, and community-driven safety planning.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to the safety and well-being of Maryland students.

Sincerely,

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