

Below is a discussion among Commissioners from the Police Advisory Commission Commenting on [MCPD's SRO FAQ Sheet](#):

Mr. Eric Sterling -

Friends,

I noticed this language near the end of the SRO "FAQ" document:

Many families do not have the means to pick up food at the meal sites. The SROs made it possible for meals to be taken from the food sites directly to students' homes. These activities provided the SRO an opportunity to connect with their students, but it also allowed the SRO to extend the school's hand to many marginalized students who could no longer get the usual services they received in the school building. This included obtaining correct contact information from the student and family so school administration and counselors could maintain a connection with students.

While delivering meals, the SROs had a chance to see some of their students' home environment's.

Often, the students and their families needed more than just food support.

I see a fundamental tension between the SRO's enforcement mission and its community engagement mission, and this language illustrates that tension. I am sure that during the pandemic it has been hugely challenging to get school-based food and nutrition to the families that need it. Since students are not in school buildings, SROs probably do not need to be in the schools and thus may be available to provide other services.

Is the transport of food to students' homes the best project for police officers? That depends on who is asking! Providing the SROs "a chance to see some of their students' home enviroment's [sic]" raises the possibility that students (or their family members) will have their privacy invaded.

To what extent do food deliveries become opportunities for initiating or furthering criminal investigations?

Do students' families who consent to having food delivered by SROs understand that they are consenting to enabling police officers to gather information that may be incriminating to them or other residents of their dwelling?

On the other hand, students who are being abused or neglected are not coming to school. A police officer's visit -- if they actually see the students -- may be the only opportunity to detect their victimization. This would be a suspicionless, warrantless gathering of evidence if this happened. I don't think, on balance, that this is legally a good policy, and if carried out in such a manner, my preliminary thinking is that it would actually undermine community-police trust.

Of course, from the standpoint of managing police personnel during the pandemic, with MCPD officers getting sick or having to quarantine, it might be best, in order to maintain staff levels, to redeploy SROs to other units of the MCPD instead of delivering food -- assuming that these programs should be continued until determined pursuant to appropriate review that they should be modified.

Dr. Robin Gaster -

I think maybe we should look for some outcomes data before taking a position. We don't know how often SROs did food delivery; whether they reported any problems to social services; whether they took any other actions.

It's possible they are doing good; it's also possible there are negative side effects.

More generally, I am concerned that if we want a more connected and community-based police, we need to provide bridges and linkages into the community. We cannot have community policing without the community being an active partner. We - and MCPD - need to strike the right balance between community service and connection on the one hand, and being cautious about overreach and the misuse of police power on the other.

Ms. Caroline Fredrickson --

But outcomes data aren't the only issue -- other institutions could take on the food delivery with perhaps even better outcomes. The question is whether this is the right input from police. Isn't this an expansion of policing into new areas at a time when we are discussing unbundling services and having more involvement from others with better expertise in mental health etc? And what are police not doing as a result? or does this inflate the police staff needlessly while shorting others' ranks?

Ms. Jenn Lynn

I do believe there are other folks, possibly with mental health (guidance counsellors) experience, that could be utilized here. I believe this is where the SRO & MH Response committees collide.

It is very important for someone to be seeing these families in crisis... sometimes it is the SRO that already has a trusting relationship established. School counsellors and/or teachers perhaps?

I don't think SRO's go to these homes to deliver food with the intent of "how can we find these families doing something wrong."

Much work to do!

Mr. Dalbin Osorio

I will say that, even if it isn't their intent, we know the impacts of having a police officer show up to your house if you've experienced any form of police violence or police profiling. That generational trauma isn't one that goes away with one positive interaction with police, as we all can attest to given our professional backgrounds. I agree with Jenn: a social worker or a therapist could handle food delivery and really accomplish that check-in function. I worry, as I'm sure a lot of you do, about the impact on the families in the County who were already facing inequities before the pandemic.

Ms. Cherri Branson

I just don't think showing up at someone's door unannounced and uninvited is a way to build relationships. I don't know how the SROs determine that a particular family may need food. Whatever information they have the leads to that conclusion should be provided to social service agencies. People who are on the economic margins often feel "over-policed". Such efforts may be intended to build relationships but unless there is some belief that a child may be in harms way--based on prior interactions---these visits would feel like an invasion of privacy.

Mr. Dalbin Osorio

Agreed, Ms. Branson.

Chief Marcus Jones

To the members of the PAC:

I want to take a moment to explain the clear role of the SRO's during the majority of this pandemic thus far. First and foremost, I began working with my staff immediately as others did in county government to assess and provide staffing for the core mission of the department and provide adequate public safety coverage across the county. Patrol operations is the primary function and due to the fact calls for service went down immensely and traffic was extremely light on our roadways while making sure we had sufficient coverage in case our officers were to contract COVID-19, I sent a portion of the police force (mostly detectives and other support personnel) home to work and be available to assist if needed. We had sufficient personnel to back fill in this case.

Montgomery County Public Schools requested our assistance with security and traffic control at all of their food distribution sites where they provided food to students throughout the county. MCPS also needed assistance at this site handing out Chromebooks and other school supplies for their virtual learning program. This was a huge undertaking and I assigned the School Resource Officers to assist MCPS with these functions. This was largely successful and appreciated by the school system.

One of my Community Engagement Sergeants who is married to a school counselor discovered through her that there were several Hispanic families who had no transportation to obtain the food provided by MCPS and a plan was developed to get those families food. Parents were identified and notified and agreed that it was okay for our officers to simply deliver the food. There were others identified in the county as a result of this outreach and food was delivered to those families in need. In one case, an officer became concerned about one of the families and spoke to school staff. He provided his cell phone if needed and is also bi-lingual. The Spanish speaking only mother contacted the officer to tell her of her struggles and he was able to coordinate county services with the Collaboration Council to get the family assistance.

The SRO's never went into any of these family's residences and only delivered the food as requested to do. There was no intent of gaining access into anyone's home for any reason during this mission. No investigations were started as a result and no one was arrested.

The SRO's handled this mission throughout the month of October until no longer needed.

I am proud of the work they were willing to do in a time of need when many were called upon in a difficult time to be on the front lines and simply help our community and for those who needed it the most.

The holiday season reminds me that this is another one of the unsung efforts of our police officers. I hope each and every one of you as well as your families have a peaceful and joyful holiday season.

Mr. Dalbin Osorio –

Thank you for this thoughtful email and for sharing some background information that not a lot of people were privy to. I've been guilty of assuming things in the past, so I am appreciative of you taking the time to communicate with us here.

We'd, also, like to extend a heartfelt Happy Holidays to you and your officers, and a thank you for your continued work with us as we navigate what has been a crazy 2020.

Ms. Alicia Hudson -

Chief Jones-

While I appreciate your thoughts on SROs, I concur with the other PAC members. Not only should they not be utilized in food delivery to families, but I strongly feel they should not be in the schools at all. As others have already stated, counselors and social workers are far better suited to “assist” families in need. Mental health specialists, in addition, are far better equipped with the experience and knowledge to attend to students in the schools. A law enforcement officer’s primary purpose is law enforcement. SROs are law enforcement officers.