

Bonimot Tzedek
Sidra Hoffman
<https://www.campmosh.org/tzedek-program>

OFFICIAL BONIMOT TZEDEK TESTIMONY

In Support of Bill 46-20 - SRO Removal - February 4, 2021

My name is Sidra Hoffman and I am a junior at Albert Einstein High School. I live in District 5 and I am representing the organization Bonimot Tzedek, a social justice organization for Jewish youth. I am here to testify in favor of Bill 46-20 to remove Student Resource Officers from Montgomery County Public schools. Thank you to Council President Hucker and Councilmembers Riemer and Jawando for your leadership on this issue.

Removing police from schools is a racial justice issue, and racial justice is one of the central values I have been taught through my Jewish education. At my Jewish summer camp, Habonim Dror Camp Moshava, we learn that it isn't enough to just be neutral in the face of injustice: we have to be actively working against it. We are taught the value of standing up for others and not just for ourselves.

Racial justice was solidified as a Jewish value for me when I attended a vigil for Tyrone West in 2017 with my fellow campers. At this vigil, Tawanda Jones, West's sister, told the story of how her brother was killed by police; people who were supposed to protect him. Hearing her story, I understood why Jones continued to hold vigils week after week, even years after her brother was killed: to raise awareness of racism and police brutality present all over the nation, including in Montgomery County.

This vigil opened my eyes to racism present in our modern day world. It especially made me more aware of racial disparities and inequities in institutions that I am a part of today. For example, in my schools I noticed that students of color would get punished much more severely than white students who acted out in the same ways. While a white student may receive a verbal warning, students of color often received detentions or even suspensions. I also recently learned that this kind of unequal punishment often escalates even further than detentions, leading black students to be arrested by SROs far more frequently than white students. Despite only being 22% of the student population in MCPS, Black students make up

45% of school related arrests. Racism in our schools, which is further incited through the SRO program, fuels the school to prison pipeline and puts the future of my fellow students in danger.

I have witnessed firsthand the complete lack of adequate mental health services available at our schools. I have many friends who were unable to find the support from counselors and other mental health professionals they needed at school. This forced them to find expensive alternatives elsewhere, miss months of school, or even completely change schools. When I discovered that \$3 million dollars goes towards the SRO program, I could not help but think of what this money could be used for instead. To me, investing in mental health professionals such as social workers, psychologists, and behavioral specialists that our schools greatly need is a much better use of these funds. As an MCPS student, I see clearly that SROs do not make my peers feel safer in school, and I know my fellow students will benefit tremendously if this bill passes.

Ultimately, school should be a place of learning and growth -- not a place of policing, fear, and stress. Therefore, I urge all of the Councilmembers to vote in favor of this legislation, in order to make schools a safer community for all students. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Sidra Hoffman
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