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**Testimony in Support of Bill 46-20
SRO Removal - February 4, 2021**

My name is Vanessa Prell and I live in Silver Spring. I am testifying in support of Bill 46-20, calling for the removal of School Resource Officers (SROs) from Montgomery County Schools. Thank you to Councilmembers Jawando, Riemer, and Hucker for your support of police free schools.

I have been a teacher in Maryland and DC for the last six years. I have sought to create a classroom where each student is warmly welcomed in their entirety. I want my class to be a place where children can wonder, ask, and make mistakes. I often tell them that you can't learn or grow without making mistakes. Mistakes are especially important to me as a Jewish person. The Jewish tradition understands that we all make mistakes. One of our most sacred holidays, Yom Kippur, is all about reflecting on the mistakes we have made, apologizing, and growing from them.

Our schools should be places where students can make mistakes. Sometimes students will spell a word wrong. Sometimes they will make a horrible hypothesis for an experiment. Sometimes they will subtract on a problem when they should have added. These mistakes are expected. We do not bar students from college for making a mistake on a math test. We do not tell students who fail a spelling test that they will never be writers. They make mistakes and we help them learn.

But sometimes a child makes a mistake by hitting a friend, or breaking the rules, or cursing at a teacher. These mistakes should also be expected. Children need to learn to manage their bodies and emotions as much as they need to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic. Children will always make mistakes. That's how they grow.

It is up to us, as adults, to help them learn from their mistakes. Removing SROs and reallocating their funding will help schools create environments where students can grow from their mistakes into more compassionate people. Programs that teach students social-emotional learning and wraparound student supports have been proven to support students more than police officers. In schools like Orchard Gardens in Roxbury, MA, funding the arts with money previously used to fund police officers in schools led to higher test results, higher school satisfaction, and most importantly, a stronger school community.

The reinvestment of alternative student supports has the potential to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere in all MCPS schools that I strive to create in my own classroom. I urge you to support Bill 46-20 and the removal of SROs from Montgomery County Schools.

Respectfully,
Vinny Prell