

Laura Nadel
North Bethesda, MD

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

Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers,

My name is Laura Nadel, and I live in North Bethesda/Rockville, MD, in District 3. I am the mother of a current MCPS high school senior and a 2017 MCPS graduate. I am writing to express my support for police-free schools and, therefore, the prohibiting of school resource officers (SROs) in Montgomery County, as Bill 46-20 would legislate.

No national or Maryland study has found that SROs decrease school violence, and supports such as wraparound services and restorative justice practices have proved to be effective, healthy alternatives.

As a contracted writer with the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), I have witnessed the successful results of supporting positive youth development. Specifically, mentor-mentee relationships and youth-focused organizations providing safe, meaningful after-school spaces and activities have been highlighted as examples of successful upstream programming. In addition, at OJJDP's November 2020 convening of its Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice (FACJJ), a practitioner member – a prosecutor from a state-level juvenile justice system – made it clear that law enforcement agencies desire to partner on youth initiatives and to rely on service agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly has highlighted the need for supportive mental health services for our students, both currently and when schools eventually reopen.

In Fiscal Year 2020, OJJDP awarded a total of \$97 million to organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 4-H, the Cal Ripken Senior Foundation, and Sea Research, as well as to organizations collaborating and sharing best practices on important components for youth development programs. Such programs address and reduce risk factors for youth, helping them gain important life skills, avoid justice system involvement, and succeed

academically. Significant inroads have been achieved, leading to successful outcomes for youth and schools in communities across the nation.

Montgomery County has an opportunity to leverage best practices and help youth achieve great things while lessening strain on its juvenile justice system. I understand the interest voiced by some councilmembers to consider the Board of Education's position on this bill before voting. That said, as you have heard, the workgroup entrusted with educating the Board of Education about alternatives to police in schools is deeply flawed, and it sought to silence the voice of opinions that differed from maintaining the status quo. I ask that, as you make your decision on the future of armed law enforcement in schools, you prioritize data and trusted research over anecdotal support for the SRO program.

The data are clear. It is my hope that the Council will take steps toward creating a healthier, more collaborative response to youths' needs and providing our students with the support they require and deserve, as our larger community benefits when children and teens thrive.

I understand the value of giving children tools to navigate school and the larger world. I believe that Bill 46-20 is a healthy step toward this end.

Sincerely,

Laura J. Nadel