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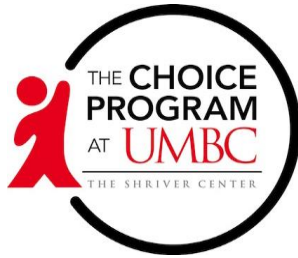
Montgomery County Council Members,

The Choice Program at UMBC is in support of police free schools in Montgomery County. This position is grounded in decades of experience in youth development, diversion and equity based advocacy.

For more than 30 years, Choice has served close to 1,000 young people each year throughout the state of Maryland, including Montgomery County. We offer mentoring, systems and barrier mitigation, workforce development and educational programming. Our work directly within schools, both in Montgomery County and in Baltimore City, has given us an up close look at how overt and subtle the school-to-prison pipeline can be at the same time. At its most obvious, students are pulled from classrooms or removed from schools for behaviors that could be mitigated with better resources or support. This could put them in direct contact with law enforcement, significantly increasing their chances of becoming systems involved.

The data shows overwhelmingly that school resource officers do not make schools safer but only contribute to the school to prison pipeline. [Here](#) is an article that speaks to that point. Based on the data from Vera Institute, 80% of youth charges in Maryland stem from person-to-person and property misdemeanors, a significant amount of these are originating from schools. Since the pandemic began, there has been a significant decrease in youth being arrested and charged and many attribute this decline to young people not being arrested in school.

The school-to-prison pipeline is complex with multiple entry points. The solution needs to be equally complex, illuminating multiple exit ramps and alternative pathways that include restorative practices in schools, as well as mentors and advocates working in partnership with schools to provide workforce development, barrier mitigation, and academic enrichment.



In Maryland, youth of color represent 45% of the total youth state population, yet constitute 78% of youth in detention (Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, 2019). Fifty percent of youth arrested in Montgomery County are Black students while only making up 20% of the school's population. Other arrests are overwhelmingly youth of color. This is a systemic issue that we must address. The Choice Program at UMBC fully supports police free schools in Montgomery County.

Respectfully,

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**THE
SHRIVER CENTER**