

Good evening. My name is Dr. Tara Dunderdale and I am here tonight testifying on behalf of the Montgomery County Branch of the Democratic Socialists of America. I live and work in Montgomery County, am a former public school teacher, a current education policy researcher and program evaluator, and the parent of a young child who will attend MCPS in a few short years.

I am asking that the council vote yes on Bill 46-20, end the SRO program, remove police from our school buildings and redirect these funds to wrap around support services for our children.

The council has ample evidence, including reports by the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight that show devastating disparity in how SROs are used against students of color, and the longterm negative impacts of contact with the justice system at this formative age. Students across the county have spoken up about the harm caused by the SRO program, and yet so many of you refuse to take a firm stance.

How the county chooses to spend its resources communicates what our values are. If we are prioritizing staffing schools with armed law enforcement officers over guidance counselors, nurses, or paraprofessionals, we are communicating to our children that what we value is their compliance and obedience, over their well-being. And when we make these choices with the full knowledge that such programs disproportionately harm their Black and Brown classmates, we are telling them that their classmate's lives and futures do not matter to us.

I want my child to grow up in a Montgomery County that prioritizes children's well-being. I want her to live in a Montgomery County led by a council brave enough to reckon with the ways we have allowed white supremacists systems to thrive and take the necessary steps to dismantle them.

This very council has declared racism as a public health crisis, and we have data to show that the SRO program is implemented in a fundamentally racist way. The fact is the SRO program has harmed Montgomery Country students for years, is harming them now, and will harm my child when she enters the school system. Every day you choose to keep this program in place, you are responsible for the harm it causes. Bill 46-20 gives you a choice - you can either vote against this bill and leave SROs in place - and own the fact that you are robbing our children of their futures and upholding and empowering a fundamentally racist system, or you can vote yes and end the SRO program, and take a first step toward dismantling this tool of white supremacy you have allowed into our schools. You can either continue to fund injustice and be complicit in the harm it causes, or you can show up for our children in the way they have asked us to, and give them police free schools.