

Good evening, and thank you. My name is Maahe Kunvar, and I am a 10th grader at Northwest High School. I am a student advocate involved in youth-led advocacy groups such as Montgomery County Students for Change and the Montgomery County Regional Council.

Throughout my experiences in MCPS, I've witnessed my peers get suspended and incarcerated for their actions at school. Just last year, I witnessed a girl who had gotten in a minuscule school fight with another, her hands behind her back, being dragged away from the scene. At that moment, I questioned why only 1 of them was being taken away like that, while the other girl was silently ushered to class. The facts did not click in my brain back then, the idea that she was black, and the other girl was not. It did not matter how intelligent that girl was, or how kind she was in a normal setting, just the actions that occurred in that moment set her up for a lifetime of hatred. I never saw that girl at my school again.

I later realized this wasn't an anomaly. Data shows that 50% of arrests made by SROs are of Black students. In the past 3 years, 80% of student suspensions have been of Black and Hispanic students, statistically making them 3 times more likely to be suspended than their white and Asian peers. These extreme disparities continue to contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, as marginalized students are criminalized due to a lack of restorative practices.

SROs may provide a sense of stability and safety for particular groups of people and students, but statistically do not cause any significant changes in school settings. A Washington Post analysis of nearly 200 incidents found only 2 instances where SROs were able to prevent violence. Although some groups may feel protected by SROs, a majority of students and people of color find having police in schools uncomfortable, which is a fact we cannot continue to ignore for the benefit of a minority group of people.

I am fortunate that I have never faced such uncomfortable circumstances with an SRO, but I cannot speak for my peers and friends who feel threatened by their presence every single day. With Black Lives Matter and racism plaguing the world around us, many students see schools as a safe haven from the outside violence. Police do not belong in schools, especially when they hinder students from feeling comfortable in an educational setting.

We cannot change students' behaviors with counterproductive resources like SROs. We need more mental health resources for students as well as rehabilitative measures put in place to prevent students from committing violent acts in the first place. We must create positive change in student emotional wellness. If data portrays SROs to be more harmful in schools, and many groups of students and families feel SROs are not beneficial, why are we not eradicating them? We cannot continue to let racism and prejudice plague our school system. I implore you to remove SROs from schools, and instead invest in mental health procedures for our schools.

Thank you.