

Good evening.

When the Columbine massacre occurred, I sat where you are. As chair of the Council's Public Safety Committee from 2000-2014, I supported SROs, and worked closely with Education Committee Chair Craig Rice to save the SRO program during tough budget times. Recently, I chaired the County's Mental Health Court Task Force. We need SROs and more mental health services.

The need for SROs to protect students and staff hasn't changed since Columbine. In just the past four years, SROs helped stop several potential disasters:

May 1, 2017: the SRO at Einstein HS observed unusual behavior and arrested a student who'd brought a stolen car with a stolen assault rifle to the school.

Feb. 15, 2018: after a student tip, the Clarksburg HS SRO arrested a student for bringing a loaded handgun to school.

Oct. 18, 2018: after a student alerted the Walter Johnson HS SRO, police arrested a former student who'd videotaped himself holding an assault rifle and threatening to "shoot up" the school.

Feb. 10, 2020: acting on a tip, the Clarksburg SRO arrested a student who brought a gun to school. Four other students were also arrested for stealing the gun from the student who brought it to school.

Note that students sought out SROs for help. SROs spend time building trust with students -- and students know that SROs are equipped to respond to a lethal threat.

That's why school security staff can't be a substitute for SROs.

EVERY HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL has gone on record in support of keeping SROs. Who knows the safety needs of high schools better than the principals? SROs have helped keep schools safe while making very few physical arrests -- an average of one per high school last year.

Passage of this bill would prohibit the county from using a proven strategy to keep our schools safe. Banning SROs would increase response times and decrease situational awareness when public safety emergencies occur at schools. I urge you to vote against this bill.