

Testimony for Bill 7-21 In Favor Of

Greetings. I am here today to testify in support of the proposed bill, which would sustain the SRO program. In my experience, as a former student of MCPS who has had extensive dealings with SROs in two different schools, and as a community advocate who works with both community members and police alike, I can say with surety that the SRO program is invaluable to MCPS, to Students, and to Montgomery County as a whole. Not only do its officers go far out of their way to even get the position, they take great pains to foster a healthy, relaxed, and positive relationship with themselves and the students. They serve not just as security from outside threats, but as counselors, mentors, role models, and friends. In my own experience, I have had several occasions when I was called to the office to speak with our SRO, for at the time very serious accusations. Rather than assume my guilt, and add onto my already extreme fear and anxiety, the officer calmly talked, and let me talk. After five minutes, any fears I had of him or his position were gone. This is not an outlier story, it is the norm. I am not alone in this experience, and plenty of students can relate. This is what the SROs do. They try very hard to resolve conflicts peacefully, seeking out the root of the problem, with gentle tones and firm beliefs. It has been said that the presence of these officers sparks fear in students, especially in minorities. I question that, because from what I have seen, it is minority students who are often closest to the officers, chatting casually with them on a daily basis, inviting them to participate in sports, and seeking them out for help and advice, or even just telling them of their own accomplishments. Do these actions portray a sense of fear? Is that what being afraid looks like? No, it is not. The claim that the mere presence of officers, everyday, sparks fear in minority students is a bold faced lie told by those who have obviously never been to places like Kennedy High, where the minority population is above 80% and there is virtually no mistrust or fear of the officer there. More importantly, it seems to be a misunderstanding of what the role of SROs in schools is, by well meaning white folk. In my time as a student, my friends and I, and their friends, have come to rely on these officers as part of the school community. I've never heard of outrageous behavior by the SROs or of real fear of them in students until the recent outrage sparked from the large scale protests against police brutality last summer, of which I was a proud participant. Yet the goal of those protests was to raise awareness in the hope of holding police accountable when they make egregious offenses, not when they seek to help and are simply scapegoated to hide a larger problem. Thus this feels like the black community being spoken For,

not To. Not communicated with, not asked, but told. Told how they feel. Told what will happen. Told that their children will lose their role models, their mentors, their friends in the SRO program because a group of white parents and students said they were afraid. So if the Council wishes to affirm, to all, that the voices of the assembled black community here in Montgomery County will not be spoken For, but listened To, then they will pass Bill 7-21.