

Phyllis K. Lerner
Bethesda, MD

Testimony in Opposition to Bill 7-21
March 4, 2021

My name is Phyllis Lerner, I live in District 1, and I am testifying in opposition to Bill 7-21, which would continue the SRO Removal Program.

Most of us did not grow up with police patrolling the hallways of our schools. Starting in 2002, federal incentives led to the County Council funding the Montgomery County Police Department to station police officers inside schools. As recently as 2014, Montgomery County only had 6 police officers in schools. Today, MCPS has 26 school resource officers (SROs), one in each high school, in addition to MCPS' 249 security staff. However, no national or Maryland study has found that SROs decrease school violence (Kupchik, 2019).

There is, however, ample research that shows alternative support programs, like trauma-informed care, increased mental health supports, and alternative justice programs create safer schools and a more welcoming school climate. The County's own Office of Legislative Oversight has confirmed that the removal of SROs from schools will lead to positive outcomes for racial equity in the County.

Jewish tradition teaches, "Direct your children onto the *right path*, and when they are older, they will not leave it" (Proverbs 22:6). This county has already identified racial disparities in arrests when SROs are in our schools. Whether it's a student who instigates a hallway fight, or the bystanders, seeing their friend handcuffed, neither will guide our children onto the "right path."

More than 25 years ago, the county's population projections documented increased diversity. While the opportunity gap expanded, MCPS continued doing business, mostly as usual. We now have an opportunity to reverse this trend of amplifying school and racial disparities. What we are asking is to reclaim a leadership role, here and for the nation. Create and implement workable practices with students by race, gender, class, language, ability and every intersecting youth category. I strongly recommend opposing Bill 7-21, and instead supporting SRO Removal and replacing police with a substantial, one for one replacement like clinical social workers, which would propel MCPS as a leader in investing in student supports that are proven to work and guide students towards a better path than criminalization. Thank you.

Reference:

Kupchik, A. (2019) *Research on the impact of school policing.*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yXBHTREHRRy0VaPm7zcLi1PL04rcpnou/view>