

Sidra Hoffman
Silver Spring, MD

Testimony in Opposition to Bill 7-21
School Resource Officer - Building Positive Law Enforcement
Relationships Within Schools
March 4, 2021

My name is Sidra Hoffman. I am a junior at Albert Einstein High School and I live in District 5. I am here to testify in opposition to Bill 7-21, which would keep Student Resource Officers in Montgomery County Public schools. I would like to express how disappointed I am in Councilmembers Katz and Rice for introducing this harmful bill.

Removing police from schools is a racial justice issue, and racial justice is one of the central values I have been taught through my Jewish education. At my Jewish summer camp, Habonim Dror Camp Moshava, we learn that it isn't enough to just be neutral in the face of injustice: we have to be actively working against it.

Racial justice was solidified as a Jewish value for me when I attended a vigil for Tyrone West in 2017 with my fellow campers. At this vigil, Tawanda Jones, West's sister, told the story of how her brother was killed by police; people who were supposed to protect him. Hearing her story, I understood why Jones continued to hold vigils week after week, even years after her brother was killed: to raise awareness of racism and police brutality present all over the nation, including in Montgomery County.

My Jewish education opened my eyes to racism present in our modern day world, especially in my schools. I noticed that students of color would get punished much more severely than white students who acted out in the same ways. While a white student may receive a verbal warning, students of color often received detentions or even suspensions. I also recently learned that this kind of unequal punishment often escalates even further than detentions, leading black students to be arrested by SROs far more frequently than white students. Despite only being 22% of the student population in MCPS, Black students make up 45% of school related arrests. Racism in our schools, which is further incited through the SRO program, fuels the school to prison pipeline and puts the future of my fellow students in danger.

Additionally, I have witnessed firsthand the complete lack of adequate mental health services available at our schools. I have many friends who were unable to find the support from counselors and other mental health professionals they needed at school. This forced them to find expensive alternatives elsewhere, miss months of school, or even completely change schools. When I discovered that \$3 million dollars goes towards the SRO program, I could not help but think that this money could be used for mental health professionals instead. As an MCPS student, I know my fellow students would benefit tremendously from replacing SROs with more mental health professionals.

Ultimately, school should be a place of learning and growth -- not a place of policing, fear, and stress. Therefore, I urge all of the Councilmembers to vote against Bill 7-21 and in favor of Bill 46-20, in order to make schools a safer community for all students. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Sidra Hoffman